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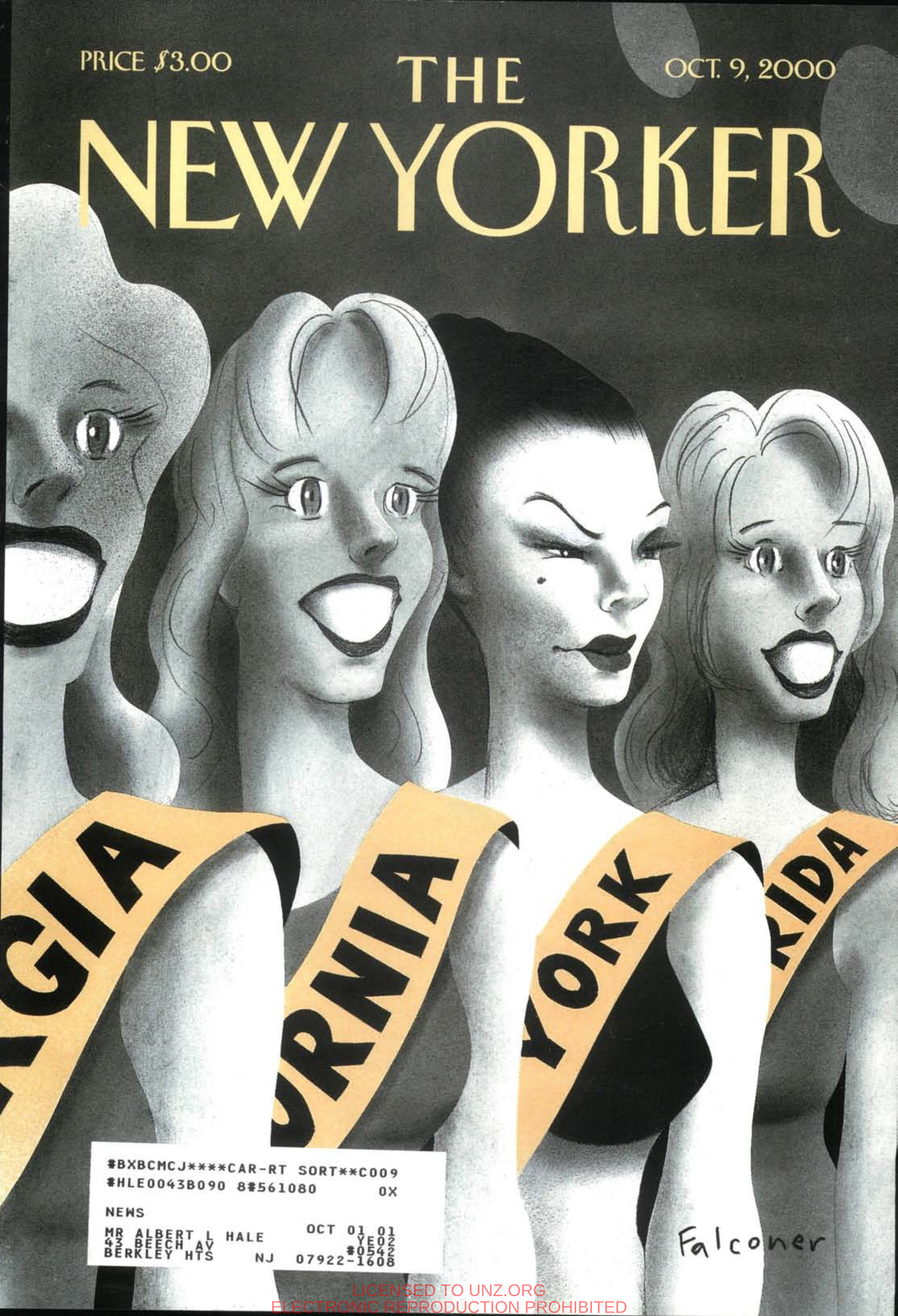
THE NEW YORKER

OCT. 9, 2000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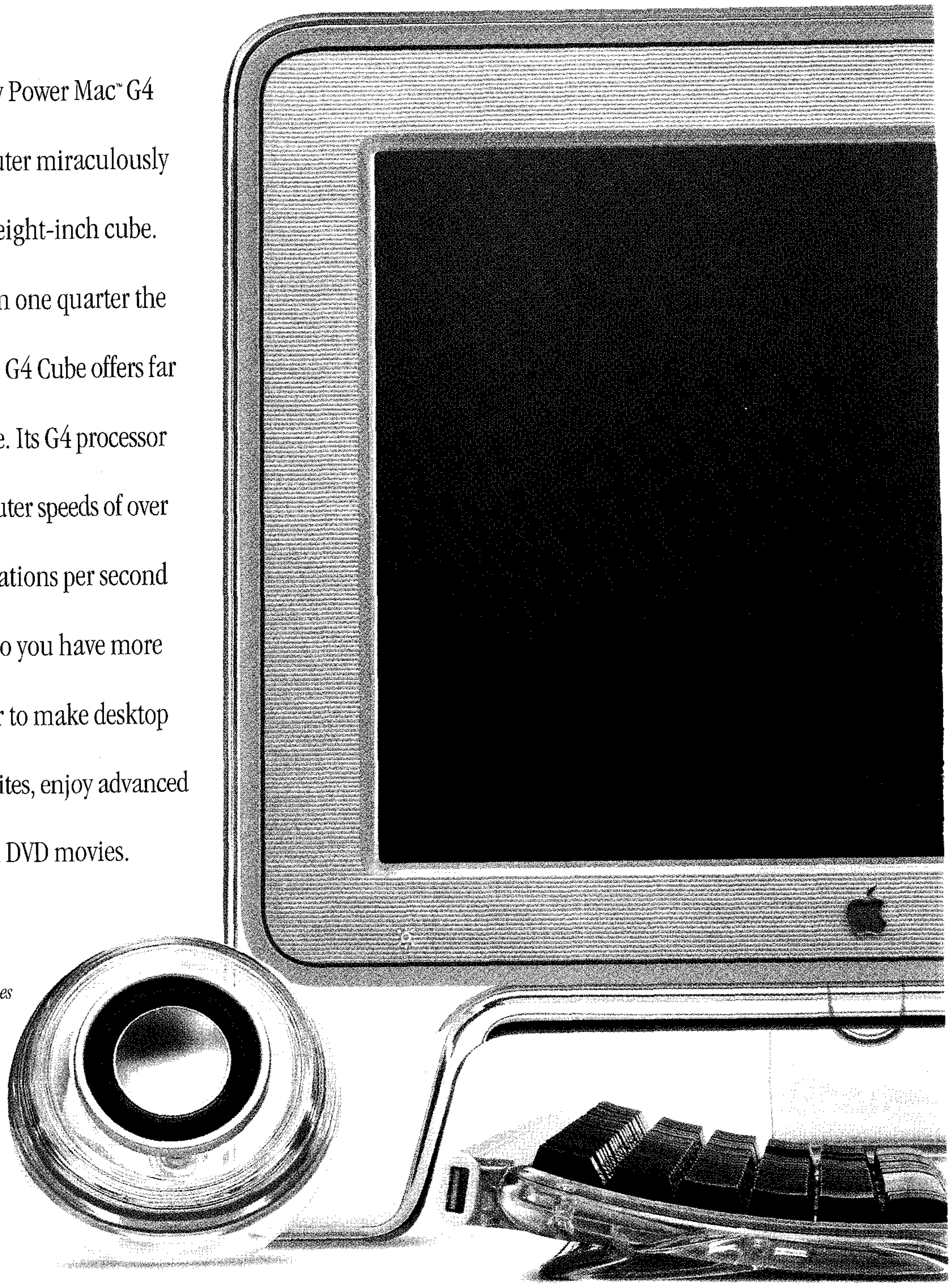

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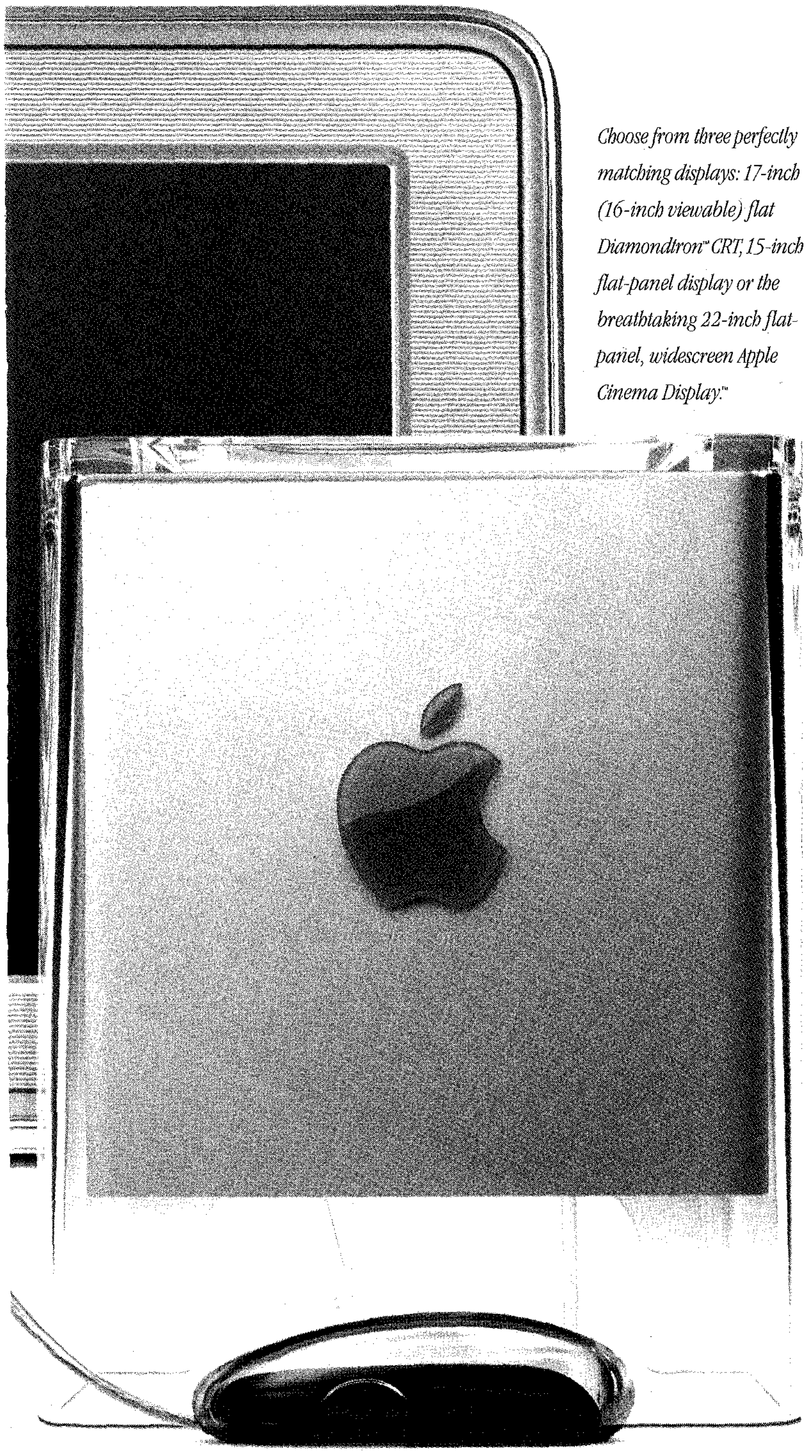

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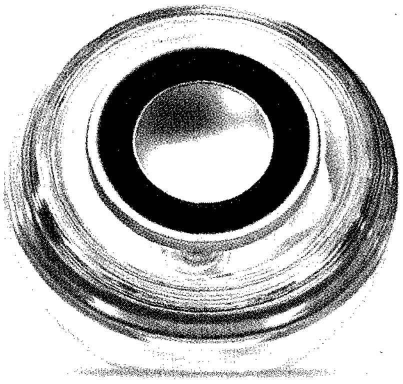

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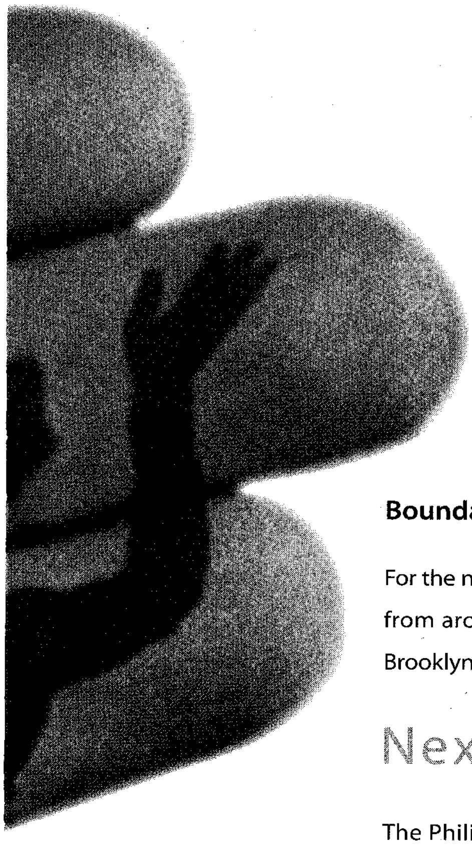

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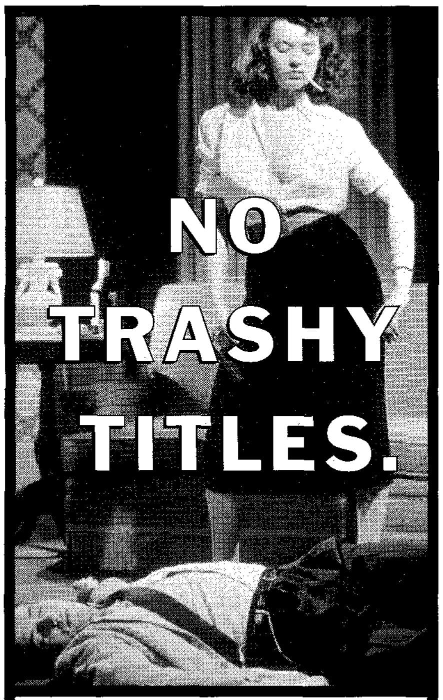

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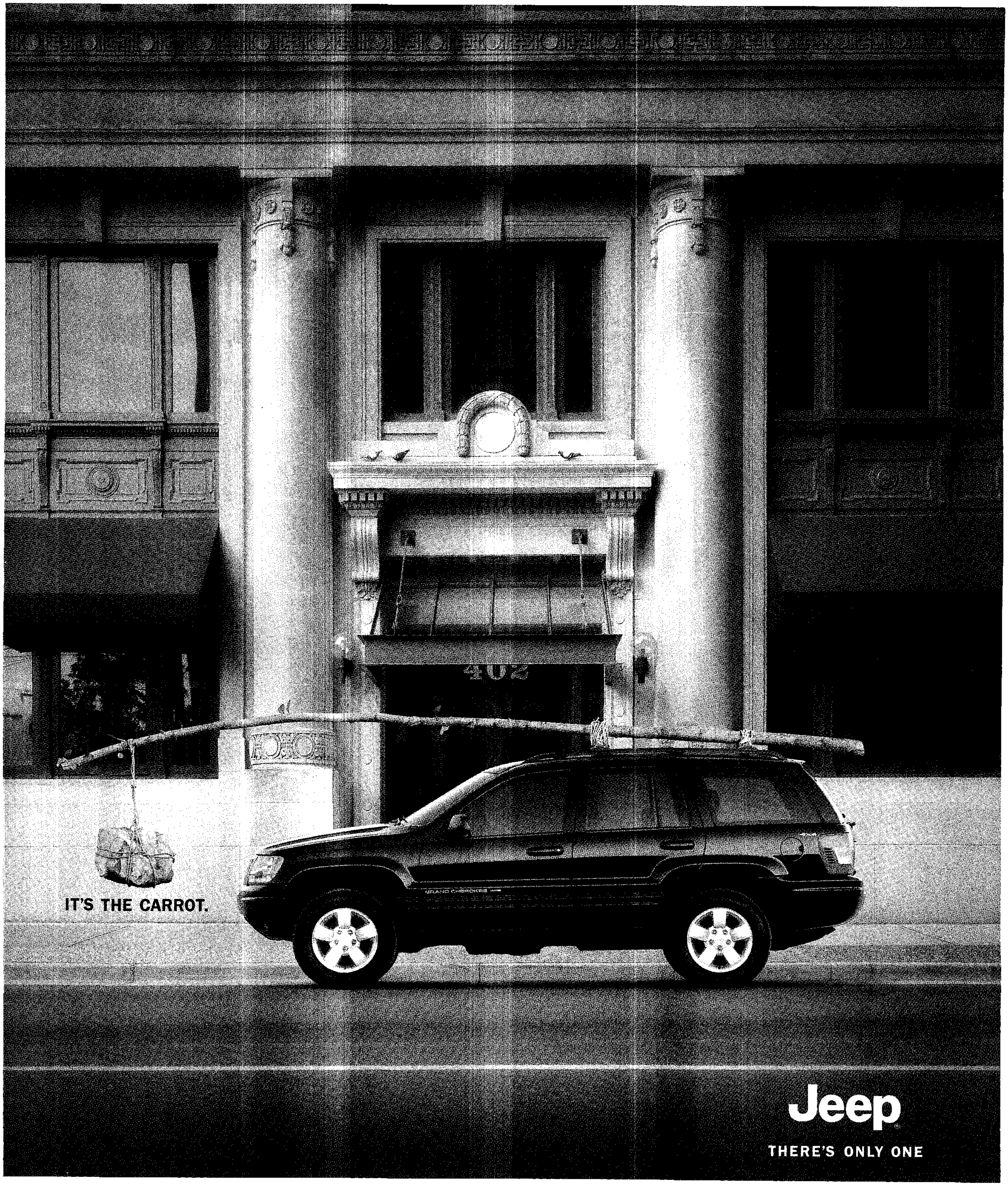

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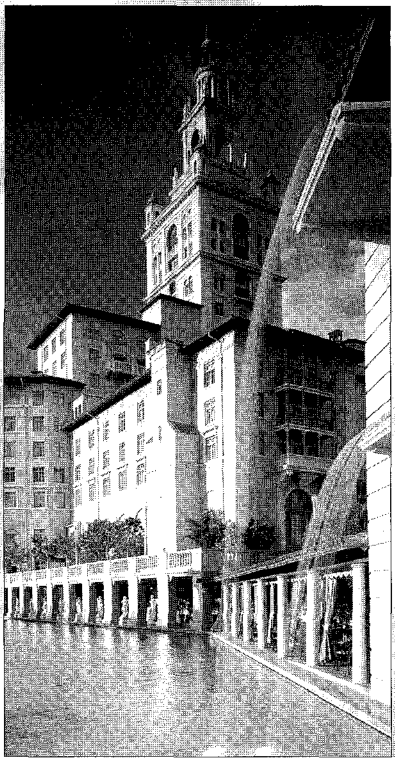

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Alex Ross (Musical Events, p. 97), the magazine's music critic, is working on a book about twentieth-century music.

James Surowiecki (The Financial Page, p. 33) writes a weekly column on business.

Philip Roth (A Critic at Large, p. 82) is the author of twenty-three books. He received the Pulitzer Prize in 1998 for his novel "American Pastoral." His most recent book is "The Human Stain."

Lillian Ross ("After the Pageant," p. 42), a staff writer, has published eleven books, including "Portrait of Hemingway," "Picture," and, most recently, "Here But Not Here," a memoir.

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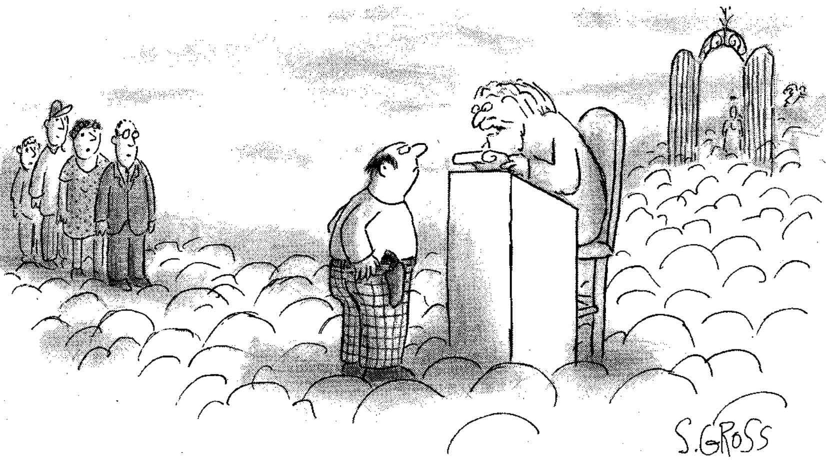
Steve Brodner (The Back Page, p. 102) is a caricaturist and art journalist and has been a contributor since 1992. ♦



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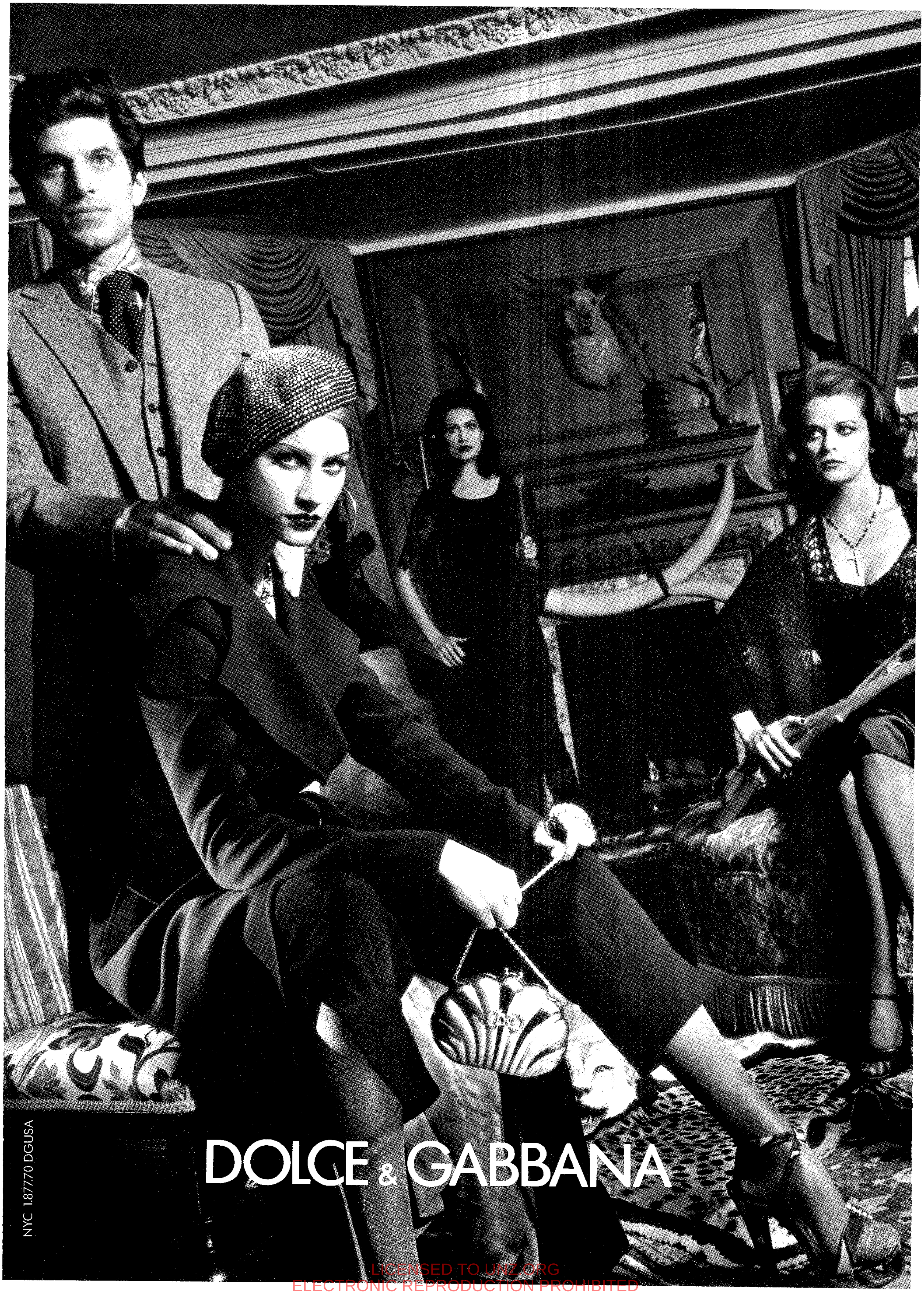

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THE MAIL

MONEY IN THE TEMPLE

The money-filled morass linking religion and politics is, as Jeffrey Toobin reminds us, more evident than ever ("Adventures in Buddhism," September 18th). The clutter of collection bowls in church, each designated for one cause or another, is almost enough to turn a person into an atheist. But the double standard in the case of the Democratic fund-raiser Maria Hsia is disturbing. When politicians don yarmulkes or belt out gospel hymns, in accordance with a faith they do not share, they are respected as multiculturalists. If they join their hands in a Buddhist gesture, they are seen as kowtowing sycophants. The use of images of Gore at the Hsi Lai temple to paint him as shady and vaguely un-American proves that fear of a Yellow Peril still plays well.

Pamela Paul
New York City

Toobin may be right in saying that Maria Hsia was not indicted under the Federal Election Campaign Act because prosecutors could not agree on what charges to bring, but there is another critical factor. Because violating the Act is only a misdemeanor, not a felony, prosecutors don't have much leverage against defendants. Instead, they tend to "bootstrap" their cases with ancillary charges—such as lying to a grand jury or congressional committee—that carry stiffer sentences. Increasing the penalty would require members of Congress to act; since they are the ones affected by campaign-finance laws, this is not likely any time soon.

Peter Overby
Washington D.C.

THE RIGHT WAY TO TRACK

Nicholas Lemann captures the venom of the debate between advocates of tracking and those of a universal public education (Books, September 25th). But are they incompatible? In many European schools, all students get a solid foundation in the early grades so that, as adolescents, they can have options that suit their real aptitudes. American schools' tedious pace in the first years is what forces enervating uniformity later on. Give students more in primary school, and then we'll be more comfortable letting them follow divergent paths, whether toward academics, trades, or technological work.

Paul Berk
Brooklyn, N.Y.

BAR ASSOCIATIONS

John Cassidy, in his Profile of the New York *Post* columnist Steve Dunleavy ("The Hell-Raiser," September 11th), refers to "the days when reporters . . . drank like stevedores, not lawyers." I don't know how far back it was that lawyers were particularly restrained in their drinking habits, but the standing joke in Alcoholics Anonymous is that when yet another lawyer joins he also has to bring a housewife and two truck drivers (stevedores being at a premium this far inland).

Bettie W.
Dallas, Tex.

KOZMIC GROWTH

In his article on our company, Kozmo.com, James Surowiecki relies in part on outdated financial information (The Talk of the Town, September 4th). He writes that the value of an average delivery order is just eleven dollars. This is far below the correct figure, for August, of sixteen dollars, an important gap when analyzing our road map to profitability. We are not "getting killed" by our customers; our commitment to them, along with our disciplined focus on the bottom line, is the reason we've not only survived but grown. And we'll be happy to invite Surowiecki to our tenth-anniversary party.

Jeffrey Sullivan
Acting C.F.O., Kozmo.com
New York City

•

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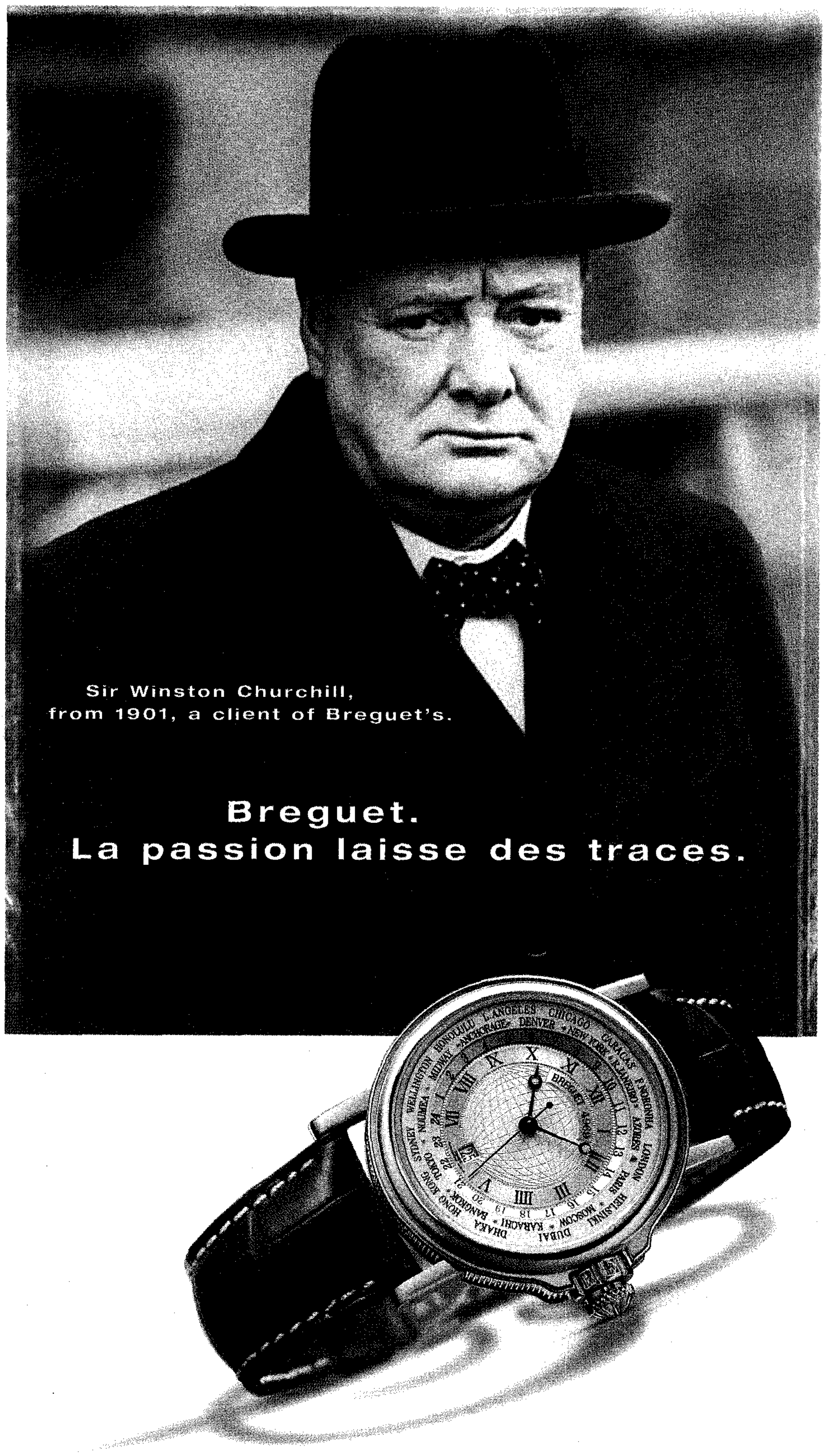
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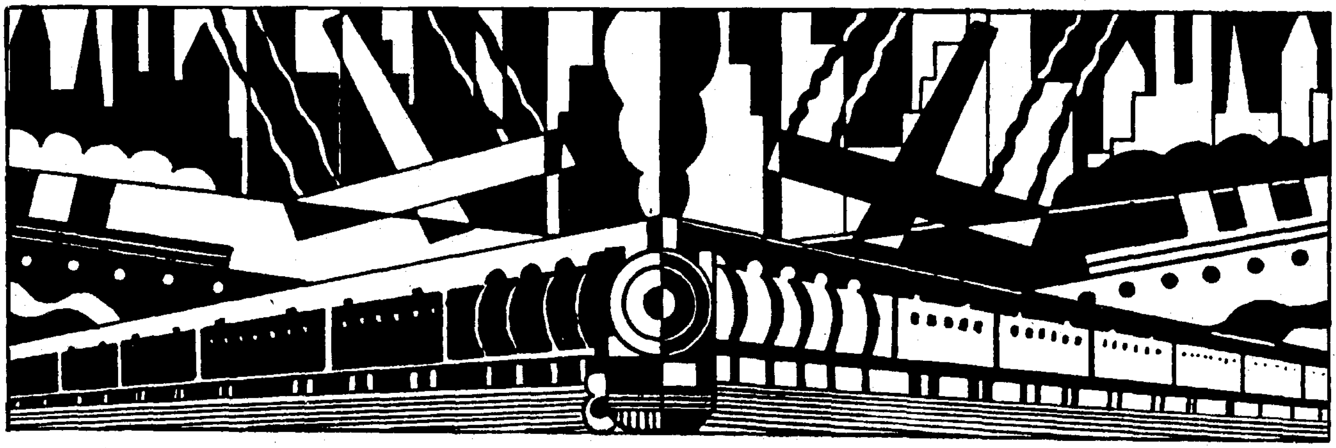

THE THEATRE
OPENINGS & PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

THE BEGINNING OF AUGUST
Mary Steenburgen heads the cast in an Atlantic Theatre Company staging of Tom Donaghy's latest play, in which a man enlists his stepmother to care for his infant daughter after his wife leaves him. In previews. (336 W. 20th St. 239-6200.)

A CLASS ACT
Ed Kleban's life following his success as the lyricist of "A Chorus Line" is the basis of this new musical, starring Carolee Carmello, Jonathan Freeman, Randy Graff, and Julia Murney. With music and lyrics by Mr. Kleban and a book by Linda Kline and Lonny Price. In previews. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

THE DINNER PARTY
Len Cariou, Veanne Cox, Penny Fuller, Jan Maxwell, John Ritter, and Henry Winkler are in the cast of Neil Simon's new play, set in the private dining room of a Parisian restaurant. John Rando is the director. In previews. (Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

DOLL
The camp company Theatre Couture puts its spin on Ibsen's "A Doll's House." Sherry Vine, Candis Cayne, David Ilku, and Mario Diaz are in the cast. With puppetry by Basil Twist. Preview on Sept. 4. Opens Sept. 5 at 7:30. (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 477-5288.)

FORBIDDEN BROADWAY 2001: A SPOOF ODYSSEY
The latest edition of Gerard Alessandrini's ongoing musical satire of the players and the plays along the Great White Way. In previews. (Stardust, Broadway at 51st St. 239-6200.)

THE FULL MONTY
A musical version of the 1997 movie. With a book by Terrence McNally and music and lyrics by David Yazbek. Jack O'Brien is the director. In previews. (Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 239-6200.)

JUNO AND THE PAYCOCK
Sean O'Casey's 1924 comitragedy, in a Roundabout Theatre production. John Crowley is the director. In previews. (Gramercy Theatre, 127 E. 23rd St. 777-4900.)

LES MIZRAHI
The fashion designer Isaac Mizrahi sings, sews, dances, and gabs, in a Drama Dept. cabaret show directed by Richard Move. In previews. (Greenwich House, 27 Barrow St. 239-6200.)

OEDIPUS REX
The National Theatre of Greece is in town for a brief engagement of Sophocles' drama. In Greek, with simultaneous English translation. Six performances only: Oct. 4-6 at 8, Oct. 7 at 2 and 8, and Oct. 8 at 3. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

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PROOF
The Manhattan Theatre Club's staging of David Auburn's drama, starring Mary-Louise Parker, is reopening on Broadway. Daniel Sullivan is the director. In previews. (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

SNAPSHOTS 2000
The Worth Street Theatre's annual offering of one-acts this year includes plays by Robert O'Hara, Romulus Linney, Peter Hedges, Mark Novom, and Jeff Cohen. Previews Oct. 5-7. Opens Oct. 8 at 5 and runs through Oct. 29. (Tribeca Playhouse, 111 Reade St. 206-1515.)

STRANGER
Kyra Sedgwick and David Strathairn lead the cast of Craig Lucas's new play, about two strangers who meet on a plane. In previews. (Vineyard, 108 E. 15th St. 353-0303.)

TALLULAH HALLELUJAH!
Tovah Feldshuh portrays the screen star Tallulah Bankhead, in a musical portrait set at a 1956 U.S.O. show. In previews. (Douglas Fairbanks, 432 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

TEXTS FOR NOTHING
Bill Irwin directs and stars in his own adaptation of the prose works by Beckett. In previews. (Classic Stage Company, 136 E. 13th St. 677-4210, ext. 10.)

WAR OF THE WORLDS
The Saratoga International Theatre Institute's multimedia work, an examination of the public's willingness to be manipulated by multimedia, takes its name and inspiration from Orson Welles. Conceived and directed by Anne Bogart. Written by Naomi Iizuka. Oct. 4-7 at 7:30 and Oct. 8 at 3. (BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100.)

OPENED RECENTLY

BERLIN TO BROADWAY WITH KURT WEILL
A revue celebrating the composer's career, starring Lorinda Lisitza, Bjørn Olsson, Michael Winther, and Veronica Mittenzwei. (Triad, 158 W. 72nd St. 239-6200.)

BLITHE SPIRIT
Noel Coward's 1941 comedy is the Pearl Theatre Company's season opener. (80 St. Mark's Pl. 598-9802. Closes Oct. 15.)

BOONAH, COME DOWN
Japan's Seinenza Theatre Company presents Tsutomu Mizukami's mask adaptation of his popular 1974 book, "Boonah the Tree-Climbing Frog." Performances are in Japanese, with simultaneous English translation. (Kaye Playhouse, Hunter College, Park Ave. at 68th St. 772-4448. Closes Oct. 5.)

THE BUTTERFLY COLLECTION
Playwrights Horizons opens the season with a new play by Theresa Rebeck, starring Marian Seldes and Brian Murray. (416 W. 42nd St. 279-4200. Closes Oct. 15.)

CHIC BAND
An episodic comedy tracing a year in the life of an all-female rock band. Written by Jaene Leonard. Mondays at 8, through Oct. 16. (Baby Jupiter, 170 Orchard St. 946-5862.)

COPENHAGEN
Michael Frayn's play speculates on the controversial 1941 reunion of the two giants of quantum mechanics—the physicists Niels Bohr (Philip Bosco) and Werner Heisenberg (Michael Cumpsty). It is so meticulous, so admirable, and so grave that you want to tousle its well-kempt appearance and tell it to lighten up. Nevertheless, the director, Michael Blakemore, manages to make dynamic and suggestive an evening that consists of three actors (Blair Brown plays Margrethe Bohr) and three chairs. (Reviewed in our issue of 4/24 & 5/1/00.) (Royale, 242 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

THE CRUMPLE ZONE
A dark comedy by Buddy Thomas, set during a Christmas gathering of five gay men. (Rattlestick Theatre, 224 Waverly Pl. 206-1515.)

DON JUAN IN HELL
Donal Donnelly, Celeste Holm, James A. Stephens, and Fritz Weaver give a dramatic reading of the third-act dream scene from Shaw's "Man and Superman," under the direction of Charlotte Moore. (Irish Repertory Theatre, 132 W. 22nd St. 727-2737. Closes Oct. 8.)

FOUR GUYS NAMED JOSÉ . . . AND UNA MUJER NAMED MARIA
This crowd-pleasing, crayon-colored revue of Latin song and dance is knowingly broad and hammy—imagine a sort of pan-Latin "Hee-Haw." The quartet of Josés (Philip Anthony, Henry Gainza, Allen Hidalgo, and Ricardo Puente) represent Puerto Rico, Cuba, Mexico, and the Dominican Republic; Maria (Lissette Gonzalez) is from Manhattan. After sending up the singers and songs that helped create Latin stereotypes (from Carmen Miranda's "I Make My Money with Bananas" to Ricky Martin's "Livin' la Vida Loca"),

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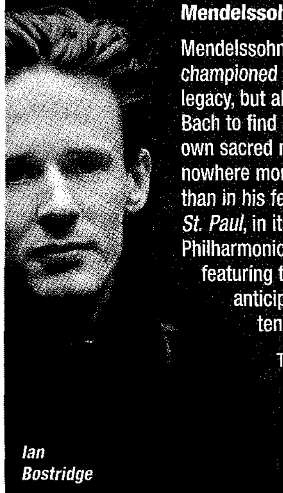

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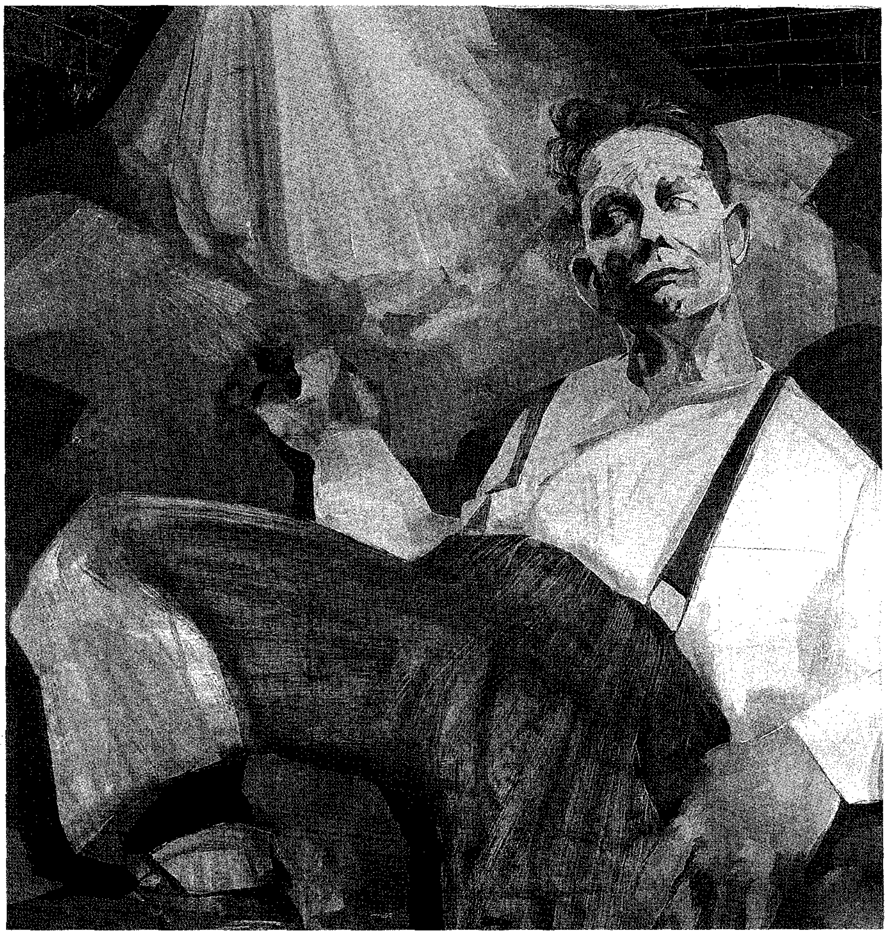
they deliver the remaining material—dance songs, songs of nostalgia for one's homeland, songs of love, songs about women named Maria—with exuberant wit and affection. The cast's talents are way too large for the small stage (although the lovely Ms. Gonzalez could use a few more sessions in the dance studio), and the accompaniment (a three-piece band) is terrific. (Blue Angel, 323 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

GODSPELL
An updated version of the 1971 rock musical, with music and new lyrics by Stephen Schwartz. (Theatre at St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. 239-6200. Closes Oct. 7.)



Bill Irwin, in "Texts for Nothing," at Classic Stage Company.

RICCARDO VECCHIO

GORE VIDAL'S THE BEST MAN
A revival of Vidal's 1960 political drama, starring Charles Durning, Spalding Gray, Chris Noth, Elizabeth Ashley, Christine Ebersole, and Michael Learned, among others. Directed by Ethan McSweeny. (10/2/00) (Virginia, 245 W. 52nd St. 239-6200.)

HOMMO HOSTAGE
A new solo show from James Lecesne ("Word of Mouth"), in which the writer/actor portrays ten characters talking about love. (HERE, 145 Sixth Ave., near Spring St. 647-0202. Closes Oct. 15.)

THE IMMIGRANT
A musical version of Mark Harelik's 1985 play, about a Russian Jewish immigrant who is befriended by a Baptist couple in a small Texas town. With lyrics by Sarah Knapp and music by Steven M. Alper. Randal Myler is the director. (CAP21 Theatre, 15 W. 28th St. 279-4200. Closes Oct. 8.)

IT AIN'T NOTHIN' BUT THE BLUES
A revue tracing the history of the musical form, which had its New York première at the New Victory Theatre in 1999. With Charles Bevel, Carter Calvert, Debra Laws, Gregory Porter, Cheryl Alexander, and Michael Mandell. Jim Ehinger is the musical director. (B. B. King Blues Club & Grill, 243 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

JEAN COCTEAU REP
"The Cradle Will Rock," Marc Blitzstein's 1937 labor-movement musical, runs in repertory with preview performances of "The Merchant of Venice," which begin Oct. 6. (Bouwerie Lane Theatre, 330 Bowery, at Bond St. 677-0060.)

JITNEY
August Wilson's play is set in a car-service station in 1977, in a part of Pittsburgh which is being demolished faster than it's being renovated. In this atmosphere of decay, Wilson's characters struggle with themselves and with each other to find some hope, and some peace, amidst the rubble. The cast of nine wonderful actors hit perfect notes of collision and cohesion, and turn what might otherwise be a draggy experience (the play runs to nearly three hours) into a riveting and moving one. (Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St. 505-0700.)

A LESSON BEFORE DYING
Romulus Linney's moving but uneven adaptation of Ernest J. Gaines's 1993 novel, about the unjust execution in Louisiana in 1948 of a young, uneducated black man and its effect on the lives around him. The story's wrenching power lies not in its outrage but in the almost inexplicable grace the characters muster as their only resistance to being treated like lesser beings. The newcomer Jamahl Marsh, as the angry naïf charged with murder, is terrific; given a radio by the town's overburdened black schoolteacher (Isiah Whitlock, Jr.) and a diary to record his last days, he makes the audience recognize anew the sanctity of life. When he appears onstage for his final meal before the chair, wanting to hear jazz on his radio rather than listen to a preacher's sad prayers, it's hard not to look away. The rest of the cast is fine, in a typically good staging by the Signature Theatre company. (555 W. 42nd St. 244-7529. Closes Oct. 15.)

LIFEGAME
A show by the British troupe Improbable Theatre, in which a different onstage guest's life story be-

comes the basis of the improv drama each night. (Jane Street Theatre, Hotel Riverview Ballroom, 113 Jane St. 239-6200.)

THE MAN WHO CAME TO DINNER
The Roundabout's revival of Kaufman and Hart's evergreen 1939 satire of Hollywood and of New York literary society is pure gold. Nathan Lane is back onstage where he belongs, playing Sheridan Whiteside, a noxiously pompous critic and radio personality who commandeers the bewildered family and staff of a staid Ohio household—where he slipped on ice after a dinner in his honor and ended up in a wheelchair. The play itself is a model of comic construction and is chock-full of vintage stage business, which the excellent cast executes with gleeful nineteen-forties snap. Jean Smart, Byron Jennings, and Lewis J. Stadlen, as three famous personalities who pop in for a visit, are all brilliant. Jerry Zaks is the director. (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 719-1300. Closes Oct. 15.)

THE MUSIC MAN
A delightful revival of Meredith Willson's 1957 musical, directed by Susan Stroman and starring Craig Bierko, who is making his Broadway début in the role of Professor Harold Hill. The show hits us with the simplicity and seamlessness of a perfect fairy tale, and it puts music in its proper place—right up there with all the other miracles of life. (5/22/00) (Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 307-4100.)

SOUL OF AN INTRUDER
A psychological thriller by Steve Braunstein, about a triangle between a woman and two of her former lovers, who come back into her life at the same time. (Theatre 3, at 311 W. 43rd St. 279-4200. Closes Oct. 14.)

SOUTH OF NO NORTH (STORIES OF THE BURIED LIFE)
Charles Bukowski's short stories, adapted for the stage by Leo Farley, in an encore staging by the 29th Street Rep. (212 W. 29th St. 465-0575. Closes Oct. 22.)

STRAIGHT AS A LINE
Primary Stages' season opener is a comedy by Luis Alfaro, about the tangled relationship between a casino hostess and her son, a male escort who has AIDS. (354 W. 45th 333-4052. Closes Oct. 22.)

STREET OF BLOOD
From the Ronnie Burkett Theatre of Marionettes, a "prairie gothic epic" that examines bloodlust, religion, AIDS, and celebrity worship, among other topics. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 460-5475. Closes Oct. 8.)

THE SYRINGA TREE
A tour-de-force solo drama, written by and starring South African native and first-time playwright Pamela Gien, who gives an extraordinary performance in all twenty-three roles. It's a love story, really, about the strong, lasting bond between a white girl and her black nanny in South Africa. Told from the girl's point of view, the story starts when she is six, in 1965, and continues through the following twenty years of turbulent and violent upheavals over apartheid. The play, which is named for a tree common in South Africa, is emotionally powerful without being overtly political; audiences regularly emerge from the theatre crying. (Playhouse 91, at 316 E. 91st St. 307-4100.)

WELCOME TO OUR CITY
Thomas Wolfe's rarely produced, controversial play about race (it originally called for white actors in blackface) was written in 1923, while he was a student at Harvard. (Mint Theatre, 311 W. 43rd St. 315-0231. Closes Oct. 8.)

WHERE EVERYTHING IS EVERYTHING
Daisy Eagan and Paul Sparks portray a shy graphic designer and a brash financial consultant, in a romance by Stephen Spoonamore. (New York Performance Works, 128 Chambers St. 539-8892. Closes Oct. 14.)

LONG RUNS

AIDA
Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 307-4747.

ANNIE GET YOUR GUN
Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 307-4100.

BLUE MAN GROUP/TUBES
Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 254-4370.

CABARET
Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 239-6200.

CHICAGO
Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 239-6200.

CONTACT
Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.

THE COUNTESS
Lamb's, 130 W. 44th St. 239-6200.

DINNER WITH FRIENDS
Variety Arts, 110 Third Ave., at 14th St. 239-6200.

DIRTY BLONDE
Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 239-6200.

THE FANTASTICKS
Sullivan Street Playhouse, 181 Sullivan St., at Bleecker St. 674-3838.

FULLY COMMITTED
Cherry Lane Theatre, 38 Commerce St. 239-6200.

KISS ME, KATE
Martin Beck, 302 W. 45th St. 239-6200.

THE LION KING
New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 307-4100.

RENT
Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 921-8000.

SWING!
St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 239-6200.

TONY N' TINA'S WEDDING
St. Luke's Church, 308 W. 46th St. 239-6200.

DANCE

"BAGNE"
The Montreal-based PPS Danse makes its New York début with a full-length duet (two men and two women alternate performances) about the various kinds of prisons we make for ourselves

AN ELEGANT STORY OF LOVE
GIVEN, RETURNED, AND REMEMBERED

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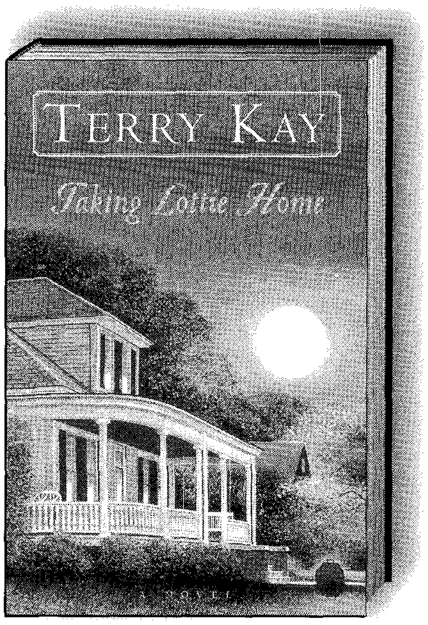
a novel
TERRY KAY



"Terry Kay's best novels have always happened when Kay himself falls in dazzling love with the characters he is creating.... Terry has never created a woman he loves more than Lottie Lanier. ***Taking Lottie Home* is his best book.**"
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(*bagne* is French slang for "slammer"). The pairs enact their cellblock choreo-dramas in demandingly athletic fashion, hanging from girders above the stage, sliding down poles, and carrying each other across the stage. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. Oct. 3-6 at 8, Oct. 7 at 2 and 8, and Oct. 8 at 2 and 7:30.)

"THE BOTTOM PROJECT"
The choreographer Julie Tolentino presents a rather active meditation on the nuances of the word "bottom" (bottom versus top, bottoming out, bottom dollar), complete with cascades of rice, deflating beds, isolation bubbles, cubes filling up with sand, and so on. (The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 255-5793, ext. 11. Oct. 5-7 at 8.)

JEREMY NELSON & LUIS LARA
The two choreographers share dancers, costumes, and sets (all of which they rearrange for their own purposes) in separate works ("Pain-Stake," by Lara, and "Flats," by Nelson) about sharing data in an information age. (Danspace Project, St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 674-8194. Oct. 5-8 at 8:30.)

DANCE THEATRE WORKSHOP
Oct. 5-6 at 8: Joyce S. Lim and Nami Yamamoto in "Wan Dollah?," which explores cultural differences between the Malaysian Chinese and the Japanese. (Through Oct. 15.) ♦ Oct. 7 at 8 and Oct. 8 at 3: Hope Clark presents "Raw, Seeds, Need," a solo, duet, and trio, respectively; and Yasuko Yokoshi and Gonnie Heggen bring "Royal Madness (Noblework in Progress)." (Through Oct. 13.) (219 W. 19th St. 924-0077.)

"THE HELIX PROJECT"
Dana Tai Soon Burgess & Company offer excerpts from "Seiden Strasse," about the Silk Road trade route, and the title work, in which the dancers perform in the presence of a large helical sculpture by John Dreyfuss, whose facets, under the lighting by Jennifer Tipton, alter with the dance. (Kaye Playhouse, Hunter College, Park Ave. at 68th St. 772-4448. Oct. 7 at 8.)

EUN ME AHN DANCE
The choreographer premières two solos, an untitled one for herself and another, "Dying Swan," for Mark Haim, and she presents a group work, "Period 2." (Joyce SoHo, 155 Mercer St. 334-7479. Oct. 5-8 at 8.)

BRAZILIAN CAPOEIRA FESTIVAL
Several masters of the Brazilian martial art disguised as dance, including Mestre Ombrinho (Michael Goldstein) and Grand Mestre Nô (Norival Moreira de Oliveira), face off to the accompaniment of *berimbaus*, one-stringed percussion instruments. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 864-5400. Oct. 7 at 8.)

"SLAY THE DRAGON"
The choreographer Jody Oberfelder puts her six dancers through an acrobatic series of tests in a work about facing down fear. (Flea Theatre, 41 White St. 226-2407. Oct. 5-7 at 8.)

NIGHT LIFE

CONCERTS

THE WHO / THE WALLFLOWERS
Pete Townshend takes a break from his Prufrockian day job with the British publishing house Faber & Faber to return to the stage. / It's been four years since the release of "Bringing Down the Horse," and Jakob Dylan has finally overcome the burden of his distinguished birthright. For the first time, the blue-eyed son has been openly discussing his father; he's even made attempts to apply his own above-average songwriting talents to family matters. The Wallflowers' new CD, "Breach," is a ruminative affair that includes a lyric sheet filled with Oedipal clues and arch couplets that ought to make Dad proud. Aloof and downbeat, "Breach" isn't exactly pop music, but it's certainly reason for biography-hunting Dylanologists to rejoice. (Madison Square Garden. 307-7171. Oct. 3-4 and Oct. 6-7, all at 7:30.)

"HIGHLIGHTS IN JAZZ"
Julie Wilson, the doyenne of New York's chanteuses, joins the refined vocalist **Freddy Cole,** Nat's brother, for a double bill of cabaret songs. (Pace Downtown Theatre, Spruce St. between Nassau and Gold Sts. 346-1715. Oct. 5 at 8.)

JUNIOR MANCE
Pianists like the underrated Mance help form the bedrock of the city's jazz scene. If his bop-and-standards repertoire is garden-variety fare, his eloquent delivery and sly wit elevate the proceedings. (Kaplan Penthouse, Rose Building, Lincoln Center. 721-6500. Oct. 5-7 at 8.)

"FULL CIRCLE"
A concert featuring the sitarists **Anouska Shankar** and her father, **Ravi,** who turned eighty this year. (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. Oct. 6 at 8.)

MARY J. BLIGE
Since she exploded in 1992 with "What's the 411?," this Yonkers-raised diva has made a career of reconciling rap's gritty authenticity with the sincerity of soul. On last year's album "Mary," she displayed enormous lung capacity and an equally important talent for restraint, both of which earned her supporting performances from such musicians as Eric Clapton, Lauryn Hill, and Elton John. In the end, Blige is nothing but a class act. (Radio City Music Hall, Sixth Ave. at 50th St. 247-4777. Oct. 7 at 8.)

PAUL WELLER
The former leader of the Jam and the Style Council has spent the last decade helping to spearhead the Brit-pop revival, in part by championing underappreciated bands like Traffic and the Small Faces, and in part by creating a series of smart, memorable albums that showcase his emotive voice and spirited, if somewhat nostalgic, way with a melody. (Roseland, 239 W. 52nd St. 307-7171. Oct. 7 at 8.)

PHIL LESH & FRIENDS
Furthur and furthur with the affable former bassist for the Grateful Dead, who's embarking on a seven-night stand. (Beacon Theatre, Broadway at 74th St. 496-7070. Oct. 9-11 at 8.)

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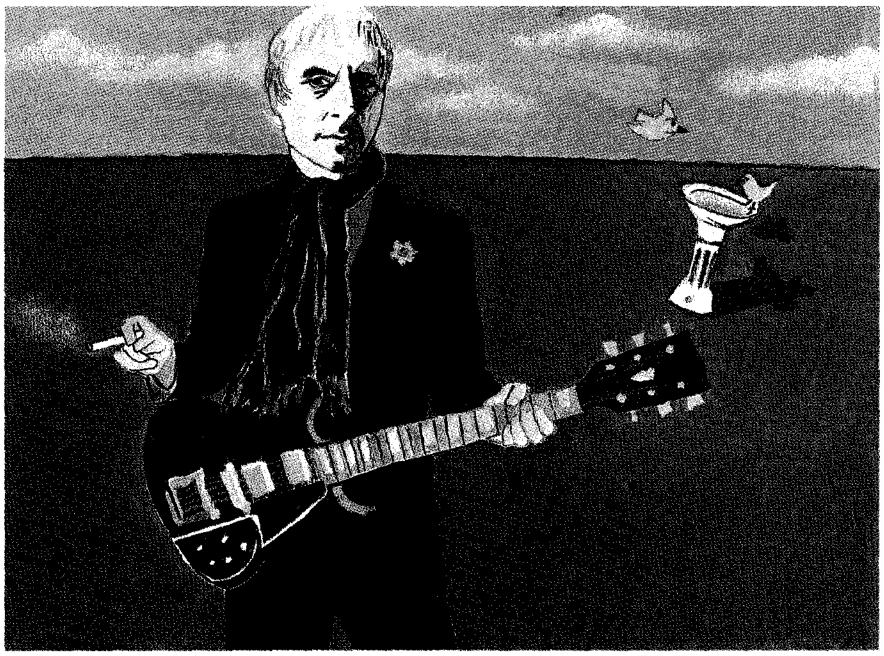
CLUBS

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.



Paul Weller, the godfather of Brit pop, appearing at Roseland this week.

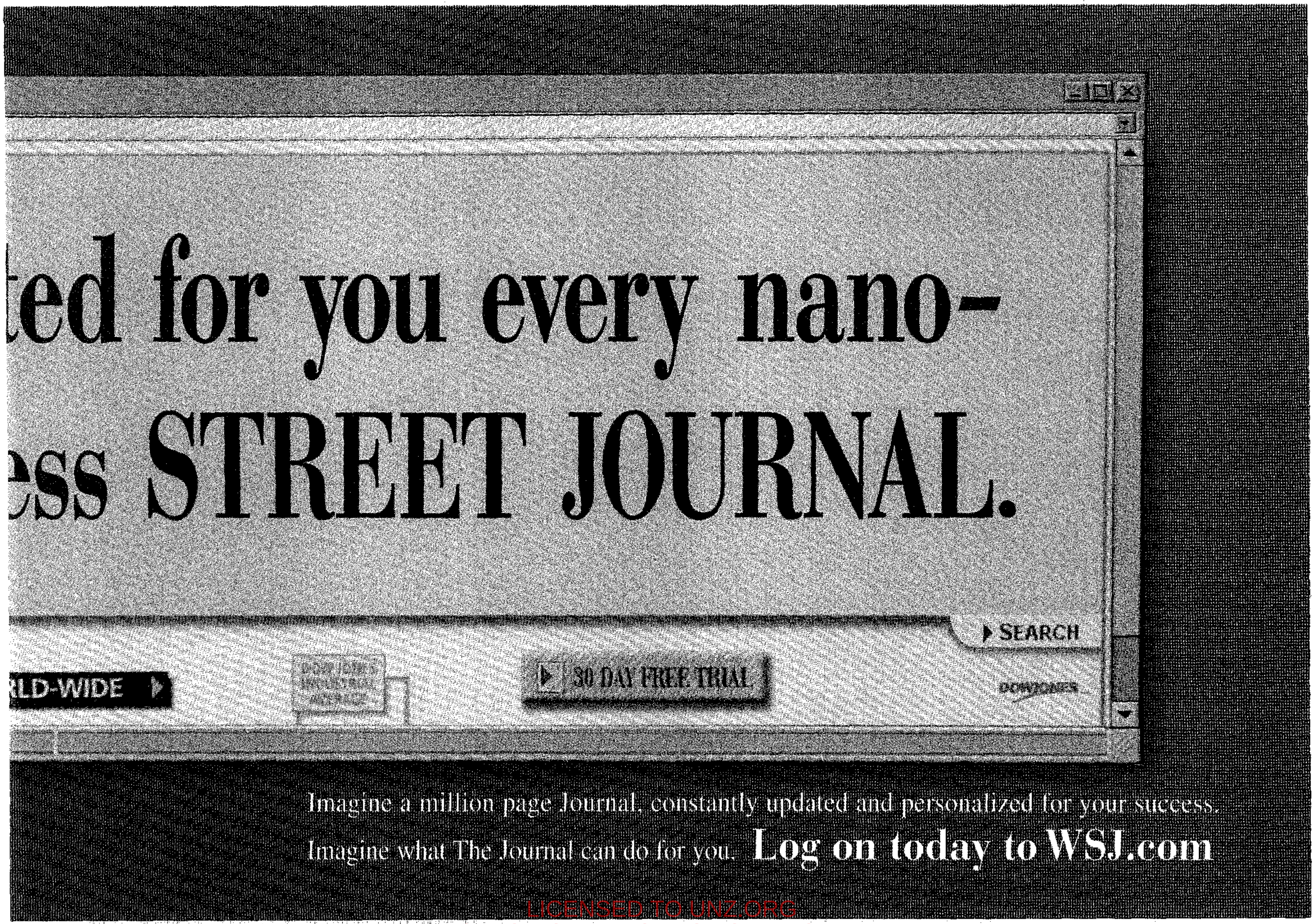
GIBB SLIFE

BAM CAFÉ
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4139)—Oct. 5: **Corey Glover,** the frenetic former singer of Living Colour, shows off his high-volume, high-energy rock-and-rap solo act.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
243 W. 42nd St. (997-4144)—Oct. 5-7: **Roberta Flack.** Although she has one of the most beautiful voices of her generation, with perfect diction and phrasing and a direct and heartfelt approach, in the seventies Flack's predilection for schmalzy easy-listening painted her into a corner. Still, "The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face" and "Killing Me Softly with His Song" are part of musical history, and she just might surprise us.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (533-2111)—Oct. 4: **Elastica.** For a brief moment somewhere between 1993 and 1995, this mostly female quartet was the biggest band in Britain. Led by vocalist/guitarist Justine Frischmann, a leather-pants-wearing snarler in the mold of early Joan Jett, the group released a series of roaring post-punk singles that were as short as they were irresistible. Elastica's popularity rose to unprecedented heights when Frischmann started dating Damon Albarn, front man for Blur. After half a decade of record-label nightmares, personnel changes, and a breakup with Albarn (which was brutally chronicled on Blur's last record, "13"), the group has returned with "The Menace," a savage little collection that suggests the time away wasn't wasted. Oct. 5: The **Get Up Kids** came together four years ago in the basements and backyards of Kansas City's emo-punk scene, which is based on a sound located somewhere between the wrath of punk and the vulnerability of pop. Its latest release, last year's "Something to Write Home About," is cleaner and tighter than earlier work, but onstage the band displays a respectable gutter-punk attitude. Oct. 6: **Marc Ribot y Los Cubanos Postizos.** Appropriating the arrangements of Arsenio Rodriguez and other pre-Castro bandleaders, Ribot's "prosthetic" Cubans are a postmodern, post-Cold War pleasure. Oct. 7-8: **Saint Etienne.** The exquisitely fluid dance band from Croydon, England, has thrived for more than a decade thanks to the helium voice of Sarah Cracknell and the arch sixties connoisseurship of its co-founders, Bob Stanley and Pete Wiggs.

BROWNIES
169 Avenue A, at 10th St. (420-8392)—Oct. 7: **Antibalas,** a fourteen-piece multiracial Afro-beat



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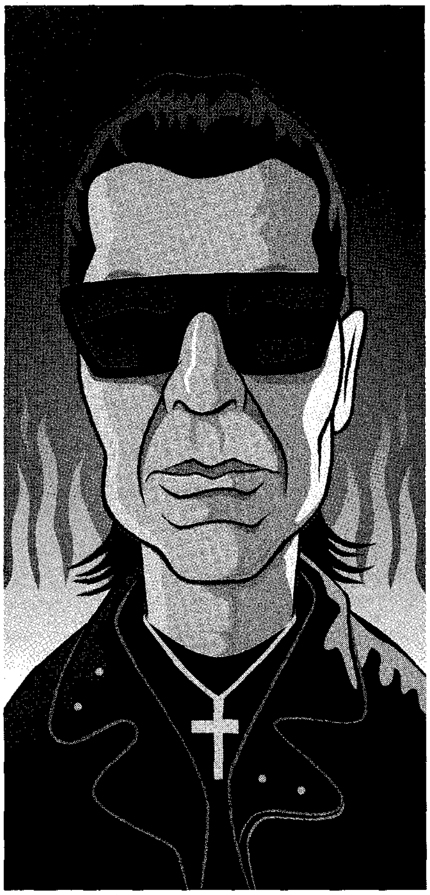
ensemble from Williamsburg, Brooklyn, which takes its musical and political inspiration from Fela Kuti. Its shows are a thunderous mass of rhythms, horns, and bass.

FEZ
380 Lafayette St. (533-7000)—Oct. 4: The careful harmonies and emotionally incisive lyrics of the Brooklyn-based quartet **Ida.** The **Mingus Big Band** still packs them in every Thursday. Dining.

IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (777-6800)—Oct. 4: When **Joan Osborne** asked "What if God was one of us?" she probably meant a commoner, not a red-hot pop star whose début album sold more than three million copies. In the five years since then, Osborne has come down from the firmament, thanks to record-label troubles and creative blockage. Her highly anticipated new CD, "Righteous Love" tends toward bar-blues clichés, forcing her to fill the gaps with dubious choices, such as a plodding version of Bob Dylan's "Make You Feel My Love," which has already been covered by Trisha Yearwood and Garth Brooks. Oct. 8: The easy-flowing acoustic treatment on **Merle Haggard's** latest release, "If I Could Only Fly," could be interpreted as a mellowing out of the venerable country outlaw. Believe it at your own peril. Merle is still singin' about jail, booze, honky-tonkin', and other indulgences ("Watching while some old friends do a line" is the album's opening phrase). He gets tougher with age, and like the songs—which sound as though they were recorded in his living room—he has nothing to hide. Oct. 9: Oklahoma's weirdest exports, the **Flaming Lips,** live and die by the mind of bandleader Wayne Coyne, who likes to design tripped-out soundscapes and concert experiences with confetti, hand puppets, and an in-house FM radio station that lets concertgoers hear the music without the interference of crowd noise.



Link Wray, at Wetlands.

MICHAEL WELDON

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (539-8777)—Oct. 5: A lovely double bill of **Amy Rigby** and **Terry Radigan,** two singer-songwriters who've gone from New York City to Nashville without losing their minds.

KNITTING FACTORY
74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—Oct. 10: **Barbez,** a multilingual Brooklyn quintet that produces woozy café rock. Elements of klezmer, French *musette,* punk, and tango are bound together by moody, smart lyrics and a mesmerizing accordion redolent of dripping candles.

WETLANDS
161 Hudson St. (966-4225)—Oct. 4: Back in 1958, the guitarist **Link Wray** decided to punch a pencil through his amplifier speakers; the result was the landmark instrumental "Rumble," which gave birth to one of rock's enduring staples: the power chord.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

ALGONQUIN HOTEL
59 W. 44th St. (840-6800)—The vocalist **Maureen McGovern** is at work through Oct. 14 in the woody nook known as the Oak Room. Dining.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—Through Oct. 8: **Michel Camilo** and **Tomatito.** The appeal of fleet-fingered flamenco guitarists predated the current Latin-music explosion and will undoubtedly outlive it. Tomatito is the latest Spanish speed demon to gain attention; his collaboration with the pianist Camilo takes place in the intersection where world music meets lite-jazz fusion.

CARLYLE HOTEL
Madison Ave. at 76th St. (744-1600)—The Café Carlyle, a snug, windowless enclave in the doorman district, features discreet waiters, wraparound pastel murals, and, through Oct. 14, the Broadway vocalist **Christine Andreas.** ♦ Across the hall, in Bemelmans Bar, **Peter Mintun** is in attendance through Oct. 14.

FEINSTEIN'S AT THE REGENCY
540 Park Ave., at 61st St. (339-4095)—She may call France her home, but the American-born singer **Dee Dee Bridgewater** (through Oct. 7) is fondly remembered for her seventies stint with the Thad Jones–Mel Lewis big band and her subsequent Broadway turn in "The Wiz." She's since released a series of attention-grabbing albums, including tributes to Horace Silver and Ella Fitzgerald, and made some startling visits that have reminded fans of vocal jazz what they've been missing.

IRIDIUM
48 W. 63rd St. (582-2121)—Through Oct. 8: The **Ahmad Jamal** trio. Instead of mellowing with time, Jamal gets more eccentric. A charming minimalist back in the fifties, the pianist has metamorphosed into a verbose extrovert with his own game plan of stop-and-start rhythms, mood-swing digressions, and catch-me-if-you-can shenanigans with his sidemen. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.**

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (576-2232)—Though Oct. 8: The **Maria Schneider Orchestra.** Schneider, a Gil Evans disciple, is an ingenious orchestrator who weaves thick textures while reserving plenty of space for some choice soloists. Dining.

KNITTING FACTORY
74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—Oct. 6-7: Quiet as it's kept, the saxophonist **Charles Lloyd** has recently slipped in one of the most satisfying recordings of the year, "The Water Is Wide." With his unlikely blend of diaphanous tone and Coltrane-like phrasing, Lloyd has an utterly personal sound that he exploits beautifully on ballads and lyrical, near-abstract pieces. He's joined by an all-star ensemble, including the guitarist **John Abercrombie,** the bassist **Marc Johnson,** and the subtle, magisterial drummer **Billy Higgins.**

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—Through Oct. 8: The **Tom Harrell** quintet. The trumpeter Harrell shares a peripatetic vision with his sometime associate, the saxophonist Joe Lovano. Harrell has a sunny, Latin-tinged side to his writing that can illuminate the bandstand, but his most satisfying compositions and arrangements call on darker, Mingus-like tonal colors. The Vanguard Jazz Orchestra holds sway on Mondays.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (879-5500)—**"Art and the Empire City"** presents paintings, photography, and decorative art from one of New York's early periods of irrational exuberance, between the completion of the Erie Canal, in 1825, and the beginning of the Civil War, in 1861. Official portraits and early Hudson River School paintings are followed by a flurry of art, commissioned and collected by the newly prosperous, from European and native-born (and increasingly Manhattanite) craftsmen. The concurrent building boom is depicted in Matthew Dripps's large-scale 1851 map and Frederick Law Olmsted's presentation boards for Central Park. Mathew Brady's photographs of the scrubby land Olmsted worked are among the examples of the era's new media, which included daguerreotypes and glass-negative photography. The saga concludes with Frederic Church's extravagant and extravagantly displayed "The Heart of the Andes," standing alone within a vast trompe-l'oeil casement-window frame, just as Church installed it in New York, and displayed it on a subsequent tour from 1859 to 1864, for unprecedented numbers of viewers; this show credits those blockbuster audiences with creating a swell of interest in public art that led to the founding of the Met. Through Jan. 7. ♦ **"The Divine Comtesse"** presents photographs, by Pierre-Louis Pierson, of the Countess de Castiglione (1837-1899), who acted as a special agent for Italian unification, carried on a series of notorious affairs (including one with Napoleon III), and endured many elaborate sittings, at her own request, to document her beauty, hair styles, and couture. Through Dec. 31. ♦ **"The Embodied Image: Chinese Calligraphy from the John B. Elliott Collection"** presents masterpieces of the art form from the Tang dynasty (618-907) through the Qing dynasty (1644-1911). Through Jan. 7. ♦ **"Queen Victoria and Thomas Sully"** gathers the oil portraits, oil sketches, drawings, and other ephemera connected to the preparation of the full-length portrait (also on view) by Sully, the British-born Philadelphia artist. The portrait depicts the young monarch, with bare shoulders, as she pauses to smile during her ascent to the throne. Through Dec. 31. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—**"Open Ends,"** the third and final installment of **"MOMA2000,"** the year-long exhibition devoted to the art of the past century, covers art from 1960 to the present. Like its predecessors, the current show is itself divided into segments; this first one includes several large-scale works and installations, by Cai Guo-Qiang, James Rosenquist, Pipilotti Rist, Cindy Sherman, and Gerhard Richter, which suggest the themes that the later segments will amplify. Through Jan. 2. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, and Thursdays, 10:30 to 5:45; Fridays, 10:30 to 8:15.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (423-3500)—**"Amazons of the Avant-Garde."** Rip-roaring title notwithstanding, this is a modest survey of six women painters, each of whom played a vital role in the evolution of the Russian avant-garde. The show occupies two floors of the Guggenheim's interior galleries (the central space is reserved for next month's Armani show), and the curators wisely opt for a straightforward, artist-by-artist installation rather than trying to make a case for a collective influence. Though only two of the six—the Cubo-Futurists Natalia Goncharova and Liubov Popova—have earned top billing in the annals of art history, each merits consideration, particularly Olga Rozanova, whom Malevich once deemed "the only true Suprematist." Her "Green Stripe," a verdant, humming zip in a field of white, is both an uncanny precursor to Barnett Newman and an unmitigated thrill. Through Jan. 7. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 9 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 9 to 8.)

TABLES FOR TWO

MADIBA

195 Dekalb Ave., Brooklyn. (718-855-9190)—A burbling house party is always threatening to erupt at Mark Henegan's storefront, which is packed with reminders of his hometown, the South African port city of Durban. In the main room, there's a corrugated-tin shantytown and a thatched hut; Nelson Mandela flags, ostrich eggs, and beer-can airplanes occupy the rest of the space. When you enter, someone inevitably greets you with a comforting "sawbona," which means "I see you" in Zulu.

Much of the Madiba experience revolves around drinks, which are served in Mason jars or tin cups. The South African wine list is adventurous and affordable, but the Durban Cane for Pain, a wallop-packing cane-liquor punch, is more in tune with the exuberant mood in the room. Henegan's nightly introduction of his staff turns into a bumptious dance number, with everyone taking a solo turn around the room as a d.j. plays hip-hop from Soweto. When quizzed about the menu, the South Africans on the crew turn nostalgic. The safari platter (dried meats and fruits) leads one waiter to reminisce about tying strips of *biltong*, a kind of beef jerky, to the roof of his jeep for a hunting trip. Order an everyday dish like *bobotie*, a delicious curry-and-chutney meatloaf topped with an egg, and their eyes light up.

The robust recipes have tribal, Indian, Portuguese, or Afrikaans origins—many come from Cape Malay, the mixed-race section of Cape Town, where cultures tend to meld. The emphasis is on barbecuing (the charred ostrich filet and the spareribs have a huge smoked flavor) and spicy *peri-peri* sauce (jalapeños, lemon zest, and garlic), which is especially good on grilled octopus. A surprise hit is bunny chow, a hollowed-out loaf of bread stuffed with chicken curry; it's a street-corner standard named after a method of keeping pet food dry during rainstorms.

The kitchen can be casual with details, so don't be put out if the oxtail stew shows up with *uphuthu* (the Zulu staple of cornmeal porridge) instead of the advertised *umgqushu stambu-samp* (pressed corn and kidney beans, prized by the Xhosa tribe). The boss knows to send out a round of free drinks once a certain error threshold has been reached. (Open daily for lunch and dinner. Entrées $10-$21.)

—*Owen Phillips*

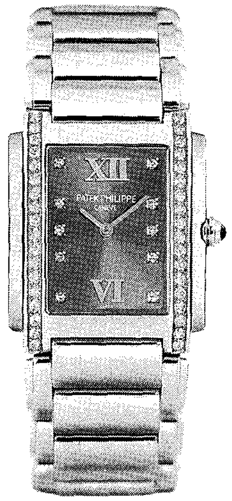
WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-3676)—**"Roni Horn: Still Water (The River Thames, for Example), 1999."** No need to choose between the picture and the thousand words in this show. Each of the fifteen photolithographs, mesmerizing close-ups of the Thames, is dappled with minuscule numbers that correspond to footnotes (thirty to forty per print) cited below the image. Just as the imagery drifts from abstraction to representation if you gaze at it long enough, the notes shift from philosophical musings to grisly drowning statistics to literary references, ranging from Dickens to Dickinson (long a source for the artist). Though there is no narrative, there is a sequence. The playful self-consciousness of the text ("I will wonder (in another footnote) if the darkness in the Thames is London") owes much to Nabokov circa "Pale Fire." Through Jan. 14. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Friday evenings until 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM OF ART

Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"Hip-Hop Nation: Roots, Rhymes, and Rage"** presents videos, clothing and accessories, manuscripts of lyrics, F.B.I. letters, magazine covers, and installations that catalogue reactions to the genre.

PATEK PHILIPPE
GENEVE



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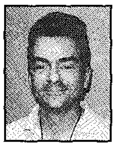
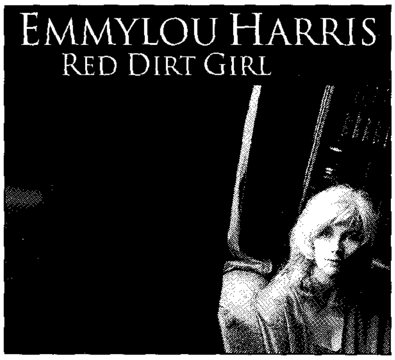
BORDERS Words on Music



John Bronicki, Borders' Country Music Expert, says
One of the most beautiful, recognizable and legendary voices returns with her first release of all new music in five years. It's hard to imagine improving on 1995's "Wrecking Ball," but with "Red Dirt Girl," Emmylou does just that. Incorporating elements from many styles of music, she molds them and forms them into an album that her fans will embrace and will serve as the perfect introduction for those new to her work.



N
NONESUCH

Emmylou Harris has written 11 songs
for her new album, produced by Malcolm Burn.

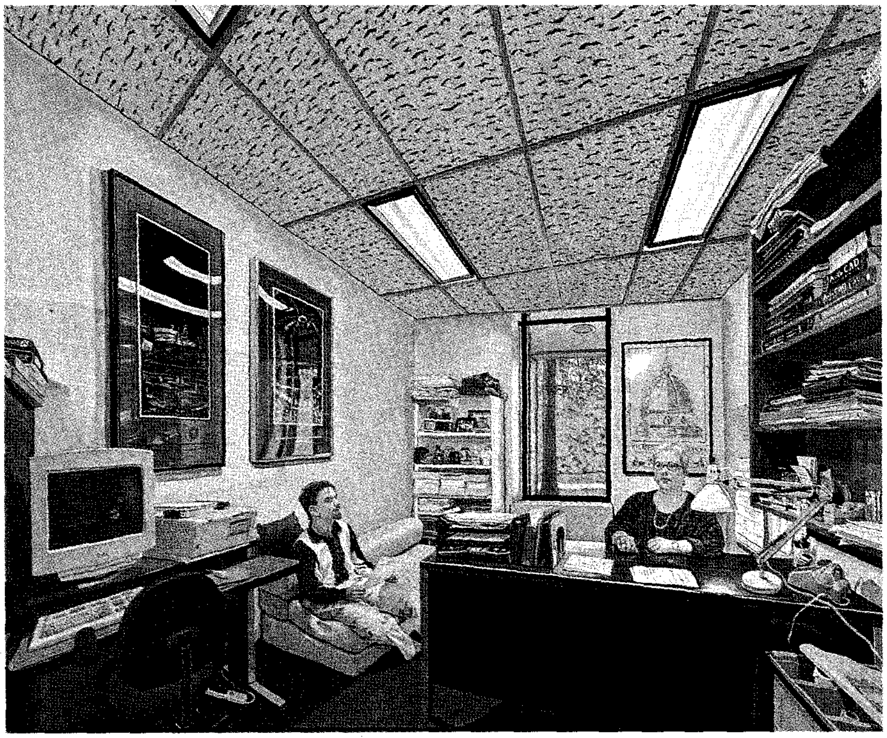
"A major step for Harris...she conveys the same artistic grace and penetrating observation that she has previously found in the work of other writers."
Los Angeles Times

BORDERS®

Through Dec. 31. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5; Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

COOPER-HEWITT NATIONAL DESIGN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 91st St. (849-8300)—**"The Opulent Eye of Alexander Girard."** This exuberant American designer is probably best known as the inventor of the sunken living room, variously called a "conversation pit" or "love pit," depending on your mood (an unsunken facsimile is included in the show). While Girard does not rank in the design pantheon alongside his friends (and sometime collaborators) Charles and Ray Eames, the brilliant colorist gave the neutrality of modernism a self-described "irrational frivolity." The designer's two greatest passions, the art of the meal and folk art (he inspired the Eameses in their use of ethnic objects), were combined in his celebrated design for the restaurant La Fonda del Sol, housed in the Time-Life Building from 1961 to 1974. Too bad the name Fiestaware was already taken; it perfectly sums up the happy spirit of Girard's table settings for the restaurant, one of the high points of this lively show. Through March 18. (Open Tuesdays, 10 to 9, with no admission charge after 5; Wednesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 5; Sundays, noon to 5.)

FASHION INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
Seventh Ave. at 27th St. (217-5800)—The designer Bonnie Cashin, who died while this retrospective was in the planning stages, asked that her work be displayed in the context of her life. So her childhood watercolors of flapper-influenced harlequin outfits appear next to photos of her very similar costume designs from twenty years later, which, in turn, are hung alongside actual shelves from her home, piled with soft, brightly colored clothes and bags of her own design. The fashions in the next room, from the late forties through the early seventies, are made of similar wools and leathers, many with details that tie them to her eventual work for Coach—quarter-inch leather piping trims the edges of garments of various fabrics, and brass toggle clasps abound, holding closed, among other things, a pair of white leather pants. Through Jan. 6. (Open Tuesdays through Fridays, noon to 8; Saturdays, 10 to 5.)


"The Architecture Teacher," by Mel Leipzig, at Gallery Henoch.

FRICK COLLECTION
1 E. 70th St. (288-0700)—Long before Corot and Monet, it was common practice for academic painters to make rapid oil sketches out of doors. Intended as private exercises, these small plein-air studies were frequently unsigned and unfinished, and most dropped out of sight until the nineteen-fifties, when a small band of collectors began to search them out in attics and flea markets. **"A Brush with Nature"** presents sixty-eight sparkling examples from the collection of John and Charlotte Gere, by newly appreciated artists like Thomas Jones, Pierre-Henri de Valenciennes, and Giovanni-Battista Camuccini. Mostly painted in Italy, their studies of ruins, streams, and trees have an exhilarating directness. Sadly, the later works, by Frederick Leighton and others, grow self-conscious and postcard-like; Impressionism, by proving that plein-air painting had commercial potential, doomed the sketch as a private enterprise. Through Nov. 12. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6; Sundays, 1 to 6.)

MORGAN LIBRARY
29 E. 36th St. (685-0008)—In a small exhibition devoted to the French expatriate Claude Lorrain (1600-82), the trees draw the eye, even when figures are ostensibly the subject. In "Landscape with St. John," the saint himself may be invisible (despite a nearby label pinpointing his location), but every articulated leaf resolves into a feathery, rustling mass of perfectly Baroque light and shadow. Most of the works are preparatory sketches for the lush pastoral paintings that revolutionized seventeenth-century landscape; the hastiest of them are unprepossessing, and so is the Morgan's display (the show is hung in a poorly lit hallway). But the standouts have an almost buttery softness, evoking the still, golden campagna. Included are seven detailed etchings that show Lorrain's ability to render his intense observation with a delicate touch. Through Oct. 29. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5; Fridays, 10:30 to 8; Saturdays, 10:30 to 6; Sundays, noon to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.

MARK DI SUVERO
Best known for his mammoth public sculptures, di Suvero presents a dozen smaller, tabletop-size pieces. They are so uniformly skillful, honoring and renewing the welded-steel tradition of Gonzalez, Calder, and Smith, that one might be tempted to underestimate their ingenuity. "Santaney," with its knotted forms revolving on wriggling steel pins, is a sombre, playful marvel. A few older works are also on view, including a 1967 foray into social activism called "Freedom Now." Though its symbolism couldn't be more heavyhanded (think broken manacles), the piece is characteristically precarious and elegant. Through Oct. 21. (Danese, 41 E. 57th Street. 223-2227.)

MARY FRANK
The noted sculptor's recent paintings are brushy Jungian reveries, involving wraithlike figures, flowering deserts, and oceans. Several of these visionary vignettes have been painted on hinged panels. The neoclassical formal gardens of "Twice," for example, open to reveal a quasi-abstraction of thrusting spermatozoa. Occasionally, however, Frank creates a simple, charming image, like the human-headed herbivore of "Creature," who prowls through long, exorbitantly painterly grasses. Through Oct. 14. (DC Moore, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 247-2111.)

JULES OLITSKI
Long out of fashion, the sixties colorist is enjoying a tentative resurgence. However, his new works, with their opalescent palette and gelatinous, separating surfaces, don't seem calculated to please. Gaudy, sloppy, and covered with glitter, these swirls of sherbety color suggest toxic cisterns or interstellar nebulae. At the very least, though, there's something appealing about the spectacle of an anointed mandarin (as late as 1990, Clement Greenberg called Olitski "the best painter alive") blithely doing what many will consider belly flops. Through Oct. 21. (Ameringer/Howard Fine Art, 41 E. 57th St. 935-1110.)

GERHARD RICHTER
A sampling of recent works by the protean German artist. The photographs and watercolors aren't especially noteworthy, but the abstract paintings, with their smeared prismatic patterns, are as dazzling as ever. MOMA's Richter retrospective isn't scheduled to open till February of 2002; this show makes a satisfying stopgap. Through Oct. 21. (Mathes, 41 E. 57th St. 752-5135.)

Short List

IAN DAWSON
James Cohan Gallery, 41 W. 57th St.
755-7171. Through Oct. 7.

NIKI DE SAINT PHALLE
Rickards, 1045 Madison Ave., at 79th St.
924-0858. Through Oct. 14.

CHARLES GOLDMAN
Sculpture Center, 167 E. 69th St.
879-3500. Through Oct. 21.

RICHARD POUSETTE-DART
Knoedler, 19 E. 70th St. 794-0550.
Through Nov. 11.

BRIDGET RILEY
Pace Wildenstein, 32 E. 57th St. 421-3292.
Through Oct. 21.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

SLATER BRADLEY
"What more pitiable sight is there than life led astray by art?" This condemnation of dilettantes, from the story "Tonio Kröger," by Thomas Mann, is the opening line in the best of four video projections, all of which touch on the theme of amateurs and charlatans. The excerpted text is read by ubiquitous hipster Chloë Sevigny (on a windswept beach), which lends an air of irony to the proceedings (before she was an actress, she was an It Girl, famous just for being herself). But Mann's words resonate, and throughout Bradley sounds the right note of compassion and contempt. Through Oct. 7. (Team Gallery, 527 W. 26th St. 279-9219).

MATTHEW CORNFORD AND DAVID CROSS
Over its first weekend, the bulk of this show—several ninety-minute loops of short interviews with would-be mail-order brides from Russia—appeared much bulkier, playing on a huge television set on the back of a truck parked outside the gallery. Now, the same videos have come indoors to a

more intimately sized screen. As a gentleman interviewer prods gently from off camera, sometimes via simultaneous translator, a string of carefully coiffed and attractive young women reveal their skills and aspirations, including their feelings about leaving home and family for "a man in a cowboy hat, like your sister got." Through Oct. 7. (Nikolai, 505 W. 22nd St. 414-8511.)

MEL LEIPZIG
Wonderfully warts-and-all portraits of the artist's friends and family in suburban New Jersey. The fish-eye perspective and the habit of making subjects appear fleshy and unprepossessing recall Lucian Freud, but Leipzig's profusion of messy detail—the stacks of files and stuffed U-Haul boxes in "Lou" or the catalogue of bedroom graffiti in "Joshua's Tattoos"—are miles from Freud's dissecting-table approach. The curators want to compare the œuvre with the backyard weirdness of David Lynch, but the familiar and darkly comic calamities in David Gates's "Jernigan" seem closer to home. (Gallery Henoch, 555 W. 25th St. 966-6360. Through Oct. 19.)

CLAUDE WAMPLER
The four small vitrines that sit atop pedestals near the entrance to the gallery seem to contain grisly bits of sculpture, bloodied scraps of hair and bone. But when you approach, you're met with a nasty surprise: motion detectors trigger the vitrines to turn an opaque gray, denying you more than a fleeting glimpse of the work. An explanation of sorts comes courtesy of a large gray panel, framed in silver and gracing one wall, that unclouds when approached to reveal a floating female figure—body bound, teeth bloodied. At first the figure seems mechanized, straight from a carnival house of horrors, but in fact it's the artist, performing all day, every day. Original, strange, and beautiful. Through Oct. 7. (Postmasters, 459 W. 19th St. 727-3323.)

Short List

DARREN ALMOND
Marks, 522 W. 22nd St. 243-0200.
Through Oct. 28.

APRIL GORNIK
Thorp, 210 Eleventh Ave., at 25th St.
691-6565. Through Oct. 14.

DAMIEN HIRST
Gagosian, 555 W. 24th St. 741-1111.
Through Dec. 16.

MARTIN KIPPENBERGER
Metro Pictures, 519 W. 24th St. 206-7100.
Through Nov. 4.

HIRONORI MURAI
Liebman Magnan, 552 W. 24th St.
255-3225. Through Oct. 14.

KARIM NOURELDIN
Schoormans, 508 W. 26th St. 243-3159.
Through Oct. 21.

MEG WEBSTER
Paula Cooper, 534 W. 21st St. 255-1105.
Through Oct. 14.

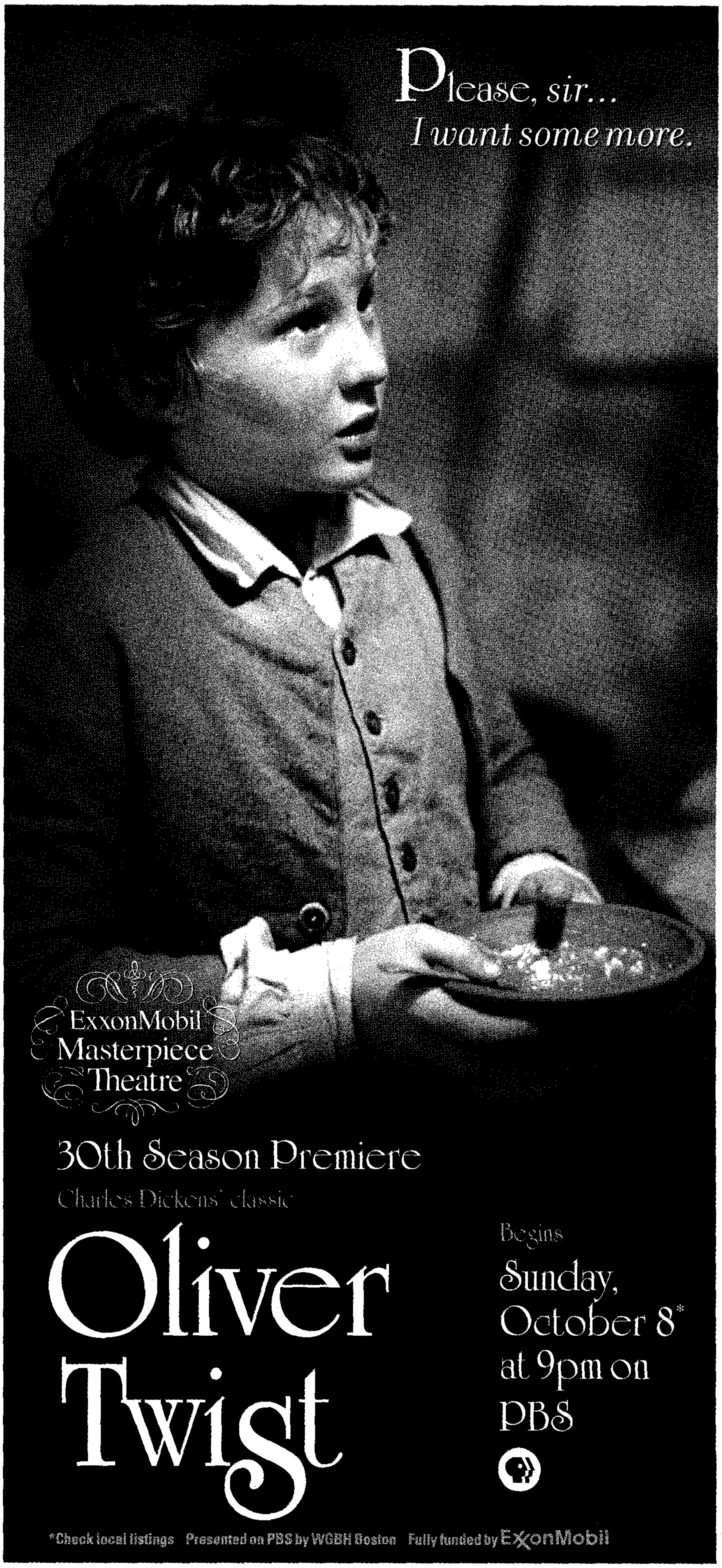
RACHEL WHITEREAD
Luhring Augustine, 531 W. 24th St.
206-9100. Through Oct. 14.

JANE AND LOUISE WILSON
303 Gallery, 525 W. 22nd St. 255-1121.
Through Nov. 4.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

NICOLA COSTANTINO
This Argentine artist has created a faux boutique and stocked it with familiar accoutrements—handbags, shoes, coats, dresses—made from an unfamiliar material: silicone casts of human skin, complete with multiple nipples, navels, and other salient features. In the back gallery is a more mysteriously elegant though comparably grotesque installation, cast from intertwined fetuses of colts, calves, and a piglet or two. Not a début one forgets, though its title, "Human Furrier," telegraphs a certain lack of subtlety. Through Oct. 7. (Deitch Projects, 76 Grand St. 343-7300.)

NICOLE EISENMAN
A helicopter crashes in Antarctica, and the dazed male survivors are hunted down by a tribe of glam-



orous cannibal lesbians: who but Eisenman could offer us such sardonic sublimities, painted with a reckless but surprisingly deft hand? Characteristically, this show is laid out like a studio tour: first come drawings, clippings, and ephemera. Once she has set an appropriately raunchy, frivolous tone, the artist raises the stakes in larger and ever-goofier canvases, culminating in a thirty-foot mural of the anthropophagettes feasting in their icy lair. Through Oct. 14. (Tilton, 47 Greene St. 941-1775.)

"NUDE AND NARRATIVE"
This strong show makes a case for the continued relevance of the bare-naked figure in American painting (not that the verdict's much in doubt these days). The wittiest inclusion comes from Alexi Worth, who also contributes to these pages; in his work "The Amateur," the nude is absent but decidedly implied. A round-faced nebbish clutches a video camera in his lap and anxiously ogles the viewer while a folded pair of women's pants and a tossed-off tank top lie near him on the sofa. Though the show has its fair share of female nudes, some of the strongest works cast their gaze on male bodies, notably the eerie glow of Robert Feintuch's self-portrait, a witty paean to mortality. Through Oct. 7. (P.P.O.W, 476 Broome St. 941-8642.)

Short List

ENZO CUCCHI
Shafrazi, 119 Wooster St. 274-9300.
Through Oct. 28.

MARCEL DZAMA / JOCKUM NORDSTRÖM
Zwirner, 43 Greene St. 966-9074.
Both shows through Oct. 7.

CHRISTINE HILL
Feldman, 31 Mercer St. 226-3232.
Through Oct. 14.

DO-HO SUH
Lehmann Maupin, 39 Greene St. 965-0753.
Through Oct. 7.

CORBAN WALKER
Pace Wildenstein, 142 Greene St.
431-9224. Through Oct. 7.

PHOTOGRAPHY

MEGHAN BOODY
These thirteen pictures from the middle of Boody's "Psyche and Smut" series follow our heroine's adventures with her doppelgänger, Smut. Smut teaches Psyche to dress up, literally pulls her out of her cocoon, and commiserates when she sprouts a tail as a symbol of her growing animal appetites and abilities. Marginal, pedophilic nudes abound, as do bad rhymes and rhythms in the overlaid doggerel narrative. The digitally collaged prints must be intentionally tinny and unappealing, but that tactic works too well. Through Oct. 21. (Gering, 476 Broome St. 226-8195.)

LOIS CONNER
For most of the last fifteen years, Conner has been travelling in China with a seven-by-seventeen-inch panoramic camera. Her wide, black-and-white images present the conditions of contemporary Chinese life with the stark formality of traditional Chinese scrolls. One three-exposure composite of Hong Kong, with a hundred-and-eighty-degree view, uses hundreds of lifeless windows to suggest both the presence and absence of that island's densely packed population. A series on the lotus blossom links botanical photography with Asian iconography—pictures of the flower blooming and decaying in rural ponds hang alongside, and are echoed by, images of walls and gates decorated with its image. Through Oct. 28. (Miller, 20 W. 57th St. 397-3930.)

RINEKE DIJKSTRA
Dijkstra's first U.S. solo show, "Tiergarten," offers a series of portraits taken largely in the Berlin park of the same name. As her first critically successful project, "Beaches," did, "Tiergarten" places adolescents in an ambiguously natural-seeming environment; as with "Beaches," there is never any question of including a child who is less than beautiful. Through Oct. 28. (Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 977-7160.)

JENNY GAGE
If Gregory Crewdson is the Steven Spielberg of the current wave of film-still-influenced photography, then Jenny Gage is its Jean-Luc Godard. In this series about a group of girls in Ventura, California, Gage has eliminated complicated setups to concentrate on the medium's immediacy. Many of her pictures are strongly backlit and dramatic—in lesser hands they could easily demonstrate technical don'ts in a camera manual—but Gage's seductive, larger-than-life girls draw viewers into the shadowed center of the frame, looking straight at the lens and holding their ground. Through Oct. 14. (Luhring Augustine, 531 W. 24th St. 206-9100.)

AMY STEINER
The thirty-six snapshot-like color pictures in "Sensory Memory" hang in four grids of nine works each, one batch predominantly red (subjects include a slice of watermelon), one yellow (subjects include a beach towel), one green (subjects include grass), and one blue (subjects include water and sky). The arrangements look good, but they make it difficult to see whether, or how, each picture might stand on its own. Through Oct. 14. (Rare, 435 W. 14th St. 645-5591.)

DAIN L. TASKER
Tasker, a Los Angeles radiologist and amateur photographer, took these X-ray photographs of flowers in the nineteen-thirties. Rather than displaying the X-rays, he used them as negatives, producing prints with such delicate lines that petals appear as wisps of gray smoke. Technological novelty never overwhelms the images, but it does allow Tasker, who professed an interest in "the love life of plants," to show a lily stamen's alarmingly full length and to make "Wide Open Lotus" particularly suggestive. Through Oct. 14. (Greenberg, 120 Wooster St. 334-0010.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY
1130 Fifth Ave., at 94th St. (860-1777)—**"Eugène Atget: The Pioneer."** Opens Oct. 7. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10-5; Fridays, 10-8; Saturdays and Sundays, 10-6.)

Short List

PINO DAL GAL
De Lellis, 47 E. 68th St. 327-1482.
Through Oct. 28.

ROBERT FRANK
Scalo, 560 Broadway. 334-9393.
Through Oct. 21.

SHINZO AND ROSO FUKUHARA
Sepia, 148 W. 24th St. 645-9444.
Through Oct. 14.

MICHAEL KENNA
Mann, 210 Eleventh Ave., at 24th St.
989-7600. Through Oct. 21.

JOEL MEYEROWITZ
Meyerowitz, 580 Broadway. 625-3434.
Through Oct. 21.

ROBERT POLIDORI
Pace/MacGill, 32 E. 57th St. 759-7999.
Through Oct. 14.

BERT TEUNISSEN
Gallery 24, at 552 W. 24th St.
414-0370. Through Oct. 14.

TOM WOOD
Erben, 516 W. 20th St. 645-8701.
Through Nov. 4.

See the museum listings for photography exhibitions at the Metropolitan Museum and the Whitney Museum.

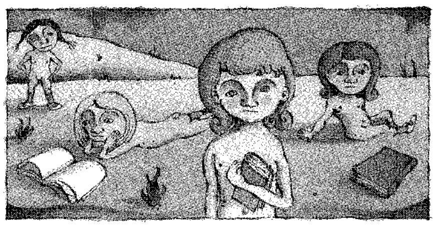
CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
The Met continues performances of its fall operas: **"Turandot,"** with set designs by Franco Zeffirelli, and Sharon Sweet as Turandot; conducted by Marco Armiliato. (Oct. 4 at 8 and Oct. 7 at 1:30.) ♦ **"Pelléas et Mélisande,"** featuring Dwayne Croft

BOOK CURRENTS

On the Outside, Looking Inward



In 1973, a Chicago landlord cleaned out the room of a recently deceased tenant and found, among plaster statues of saints and hundreds of empty Pepto-Bismol bottles, a collection of fantastic watercolor drawings and more than fifteen thousand pages of typewritten prose. That tenant, Henry Darger, has since earned international renown as an outsider artist; his work is collected for the first time in **HENRY DARGER: ART AND SELECTED WRITINGS** (Rizzoli).

Darger's drawings and writings chronicle the war between a race of satanic generals and a virtuous army of child slaves, led by seven princesses called the Vivian Girls. The female warriors are in constant metamorphosis, sprouting horns, butterfly wings, and, in some cases, male genitalia. After seeing Darger's work, the poet John Ashbery re-created the vivid, hermetic world of the princesses in a book-length poem, **GIRLS ON THE RUN** (FSG). The clamor of voices that populate Ashbery's poem makes it feel as dense as one of Darger's landscapes: "Everywhere in the tangled schist / someone was living, it seemed to say, this is my doing; / whoever shall come afterward is a delusion."

Darger was hardly the only marginal artist to design an intricate fantasy world. In **RAW CREATION: OUTSIDER ART AND BEYOND** (Phaidon), a 1996 survey of the genre newly available in paperback, John Maizels describes how Nek Chand Saini, a retired road inspector in northern India, built a twenty-five-acre sculpture garden from old bicycle parts, broken ceramic tiles, and glass bracelets. The garden receives more than five thousand visitors a day, but its creator doesn't take full credit. "Nowadays people are calling me 'artist,'" Saini says. "I don't like this word 'artist.' Only God pushed me to do this work."

—*Nell Freudenberger*

SERGIO RUZZIER

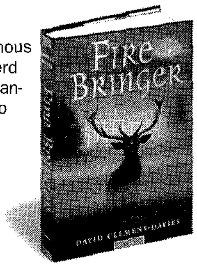
Books.

[AT BARNES & NOBLE]

Tales of Epic Proportions

FIRE BRINGER

by David Clement-Davies



Myth, legend and gospel blend together in this luminous tale of heroes and warriors. The Herla—a special herd of deer—are fighting for independence from their tyrannical new lord and as prophesied, a hero emerges to win their freedom. (Dutton)

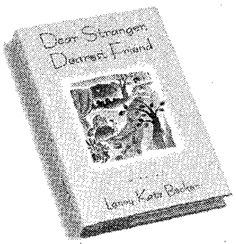
Pub. Price: $19.95

Discount **20%**

Our Price: $15.96

DEAR STRANGER, DEAREST FRIEND

by Laney Katz Becker



This deeply moving story of two courageous women who become soulmates after meeting online is a testament to the power of friendship, love and hope, especially in the wake of crisis. (William Morrow)

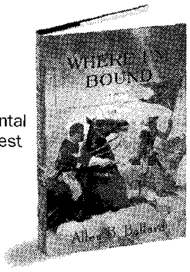
Pub. Price: $24.00

Discount **20%**

Our Price: $19.20

WHERE I'M BOUND

by Allen B. Ballard



Inspired by the legacy of a black cavalry unit in Mississippi, this spellbinding tale of Joe Duckett, an escaped slave who joins the Union Army, combines historical fact with hypnotic storytelling. Bringing to vivid life the noble fight for freedom and its monumental effects on an entire country, Duckett faces his greatest challenge as he sets out to return to his former plantation to free his family. (Simon & Schuster)

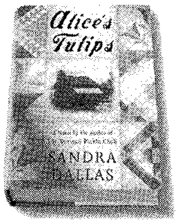
Pub. Price: $24.00

Discount **20%**

Our Price: $19.20

ALICE'S TULIPS

by Sandra Dallas



From the author of the bestselling *Persian Pickle Club* comes the story of Alice, a young bride, deposited by her Union soldier husband on his Iowa farm with his intimidating mother during the Civil War. She is forced to accept the aid of unlikely sources after being accused of murder in this triumphant story illuminating the realities of a woman's life in the 1800s. (St. Martin's Press)

Pub. Price: $22.95

Discount **20%**

Our Price: $18.36

THE FISHER KING

by Paule Marshall

The Fisher King
Paule Marshall

In this poignant novel spanning half a century of love, redemption and jazz, an eight-year-old boy born and raised in Paris comes "home" to Brooklyn to meet his relatives for the first time. As he learns about his family's estranged history, he comes to care for his relatives and they, in turn, learn to heal old wounds. (Scribner)

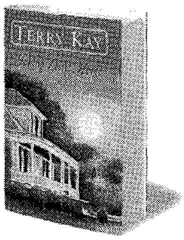
Pub. Price: $23.00

Discount **20%**

Our Price: $18.40

TAKING LOTTIE HOME

by Terry Kay



Two former baseball players about to leave town for greener pastures meet Lottie, the woman who changes their lives forever. An innocent who mesmerizes everyone with her caring and giving nature, she marries Foster, but is ultimately rescued by Ben after tragedy strikes. (William Morrow)

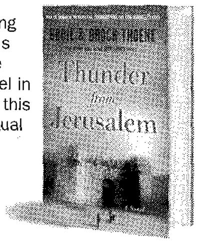
Pub. Price: $25.00

Discount **20%**

Our Price: $20.00

THUNDER FROM JERUSALEM

by Bodie & Brock Thoene



This compelling second volume in the breathtaking saga of the Zion Legacy series follows the world's most sacred city at its pivotal battle with outside forces five days after the birth of the state of Israel in 1948. Heroic and tragic, triumphant and uplifting, this timely tale blends historical authenticity with spiritual adventure. (Viking)

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by Gail Tsukiyama

Gail Tsukiyama
The Language of Threads

This sequel to the acclaimed *Women of the Silk* finds Pei looking to start a new life after she arrives in Hong Kong in 1938 with a young orphan under her wing. After war and the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong tears her new family apart, Pei once again struggles to survive. (Griffin Trade Paperbacks)

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Prices effective at store locations through 10/16/00 and Susanne Mentzer in the title roles; conducted by James Levine. (Oct. 5 at 7:30 and Oct. 10 at 8.) ♦ **"Don Giovanni,"** with Renée Fleming; Mr. Levine. (Oct. 6 at 8 and Oct. 9 at 8.) ♦ **"Samson et Dalila,"** with Plácido Domingo; Mark Elder. (Oct. 7 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 362-6000.)

NEW YORK CITY OPERA
Oct. 4 at 7:30 and Oct. 7 at 8: Donizetti's **"Roberto Devereux,"** with soprano Lauren Flanigan in the role of Queen Elizabeth and a cast that also includes mezzo-soprano Jane Dutton, tenor Fernando De La Mora, and baritone Mark Delavan; conducted by George Manahan. ♦ Oct. 5 at 7:30 and Oct. 8 at 1:30: **"La Traviata,"** with Mary Dunleavy, Bruce Fowler, and Stephen Powell; Joseph Rescigno. ♦ Oct. 6 at 8: **"Madama Butterfly."** ♦ Oct. 7 at 1:30: Benjamin Britten's 1954 adaptation of Henry James's ghost story, **"The Turn of the Screw,"** featuring the soprano Amy Burton in the role of the governess, returns to the company's repertoire. Stewart Robertson conducts. (New York State Theatre. 870-5570.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
Kurt Masur conducts the continuing Mendelssohn celebrations. The tenor Ian Bostridge will début in the oratorio "St. Paul," a passionately spiritual work that demonstrates Mendelssohn's debt to Bach. Other performers include the mezzo-soprano Margaret Lattimore, the soprano Edith Wiens, and the baritone Christopher Maltman, also making his début. (Avery Fisher Hall. 875-5030. Oct. 5-7 at 8 and Oct. 10 at 7:30.)

ORCHESTRA OF ST. LUKE'S
The soprano Renée Fleming, also appearing in "Don Giovanni" at the Met, sings with the orchestra, and with the baritone Dmitri Hvorostovsky, as part of Lincoln Center's Great Performers series. The program will include excerpts from Tchaikovsky's "Eugene Onegin"; Mark Elder conducts. (Avery Fisher Hall. 875-5030. Oct. 4 at 8.)

"SYMPHONY NO. 5"
To celebrate the new millennium, Philip Glass created this new work, which comprises twelve movements, five soloists, a chorus, an additional children's choir, and an orchestra. In this performance, the role of the orchestra will be played by the Brooklyn Philharmonic, conducted by Dennis Russell Davies. Written in collaboration with the Very Reverend James Parks Morton (of the Interfaith Center of New York) and Kusumita P. Pedersen (a professor at St. Francis College), Glass's symphony touches on a wide variety of spiritual traditions, from the Tibetan "Book of the Dead" to the writings of Thomas Merton. This performance, which is part of BAM's 2000 Next Wave Festival, marks the first time the work has been seen in North America. (BAM's Howard Gilman Opera House, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn. 718-636-4111. Oct. 4 and Oct. 6-7 at 8.)

CLEVELAND ORCHESTRA
In town to help open Carnegie Hall's hundred-and-tenth season, the orchestra appeared at a gala benefit last week, and continues performances this week. Oct. 4 at 8: Beethoven's "Grosse Fuge" and the New York première of Henze's "Requiem—Nine Sacred Concertos for Chamber Ensemble," with soloists Michael Sachs (on trumpet) and Joela Jones (on piano). Oct. 5 at 8: Another New York première, Lindberg's "Cantigas," as well as Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 4 in F Minor, and Berio's "Folksongs," with mezzo-soprano Dagmar Pecková. (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800.)

ORPHEUS CHAMBER ORCHESTRA
The brilliant conductorless orchestra opens its Carnegie Hall season with an eclectic quartet of pieces: Stravinsky's "Apollon Musagete"; Strauss's "Duet Concertina," for clarinet, bassoon, and orchestra; Beethoven's Symphony No. 8 in F Major; and the concert-hall première of Copland's "Midday Thoughts" (David Del Tredici's orchestral version, which was commissioned by National Public Radio's Performance Today to mark the centennial of Copland's birth). (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. Oct. 7 at 8.)

MANNES ORCHESTRA
The conductor David Hayes leads the orchestra in Berlioz's overture to "Benvenuto Cellini," Brahms's Symphony No. 2 in D Major, and other works. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. Oct. 5 at 8. No tickets necessary.)

ICELAND SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
The violinist Judith Ingolfsson performs Aram Khachaturian's Violin Concerto with the Reykjavík-based orchestra, which is touring the New World in celebration of the millennial anniversary of Leif Eriksson's earlier visit. (247-7800. Oct. 9 at 8.)

PHILADELPHIA ORCHESTRA
In the first of seven Carnegie Hall engagements this year, the orchestra, led by Wolfgang Sawallisch, presents the winner of its centennial composition competition, as well as Brahms's Violin Concerto in D Major, with soloist Hilary Hahn, and Stravinsky's "Symphony in C." (247-7800. Oct. 10 at 8.)

RECITALS

BARGEMUSIC
The pianist William Wolfram performs Bach's Goldberg Variations. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-4061. Oct. 6 at 7:30 and Oct. 8 at 4.)

MARY PHILLIPS
The mezzo-soprano Phillips, who was the 1994 Eastern Regional Winner of the Metropolitan Opera Auditions, will make her Weill Recital Hall début with pianist Ted Taylor. (247-7800. Oct. 6 at 8.)

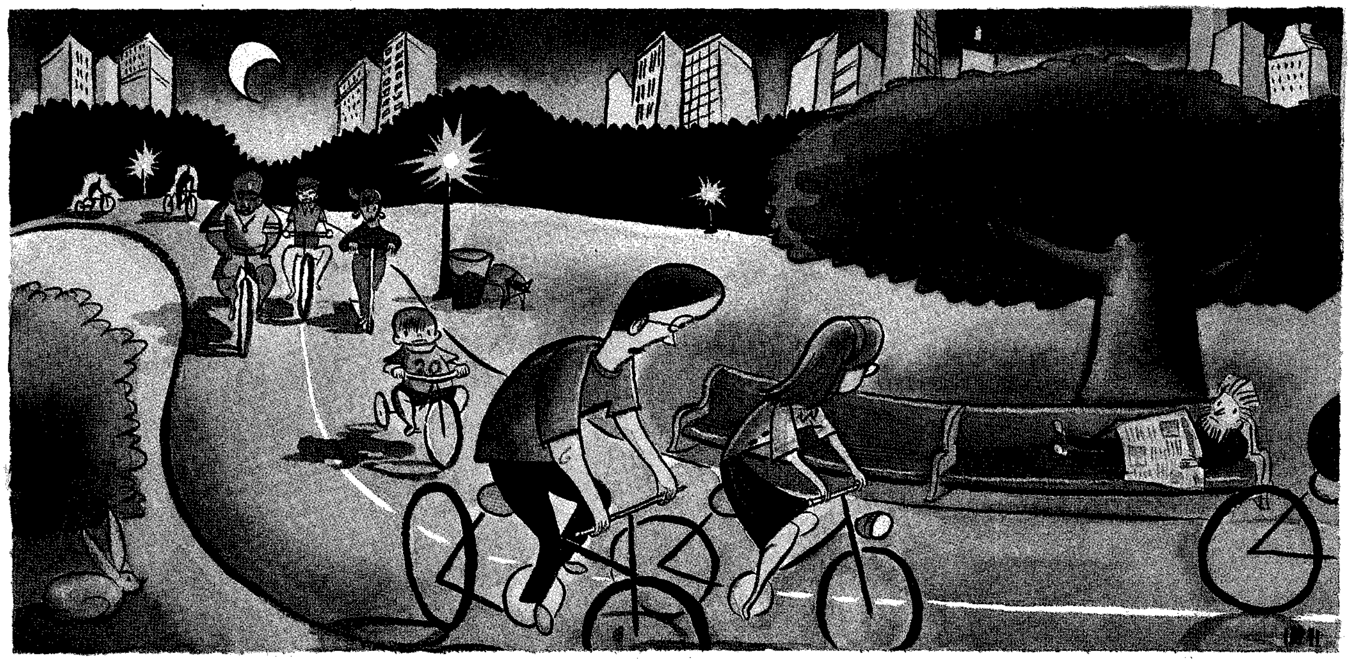
"IN THE OCTAGON"
The eighteenth-century Colonial drawing room of the Morris-Jumel Mansion is the setting for the New Amsterdam Baroque ensemble as it offers compositions exploring the influence of French and Italian music on the German Baroque, with a program of works by Telemann and Geminiani, among others. (65 Jumel Terrace, between 160th and 162nd Sts. 932-8008. Oct. 7 at 2.)

"MAKING MUSIC"
The German composer Hans Werner Henze has, over the past half-century, created everything from operas to film scores to guitar music. Next February, Kurt Masur will conduct the New York Philharmonic in a performance of Henze's Symphony No. 9 in honor of Henze's seventy-fifth birthday. But you don't have to wait until then to begin celebrating; this Saturday, Henze will be the first composer featured in the "Making Music 2001" series, and he will appear as part of a program that includes his "El Cimarrón." (Weill Recital Hall, at Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. Oct. 7 at 8.)

IAN FOUNTAIN
The pianist offers a program of Mendelssohn, Schoenberg, Beethoven, Albeniz, and Rachmaninoff. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100. Oct. 7 at 8.)

MY LORD CHAMBERLAIN'S CONSORT
A celebration of the four-hundredth anniversary of John Dowland's "Second Book of Songs or Ayres of 2, 4, and 5 Partes." (St. Luke In-the-Fields, 487 Hudson St., at Grove St. For more information, call 544-7473. Oct. 7 at 8.)

"PIPES SPECTACULAR!"
Nine organists, including Steven Frank, Robert Hebble, Dorothy Papadakos, Frederick Swann, and Carol Williams, pay tribute to Virgil Fox, who was the organist at the Riverside Church from 1946 to 1964 and performed the first solo organ recital in Lincoln Center's Philharmonic Hall, in 1962. In 1970, he took the organ to new heights with an all-



Rolling through Central Park well after dark with the monthly Time's Up *moonlight bicycle ride (see Above and Beyond).*

MARCELLUS HALL

Bach recital at the rock-and-roll concert hall the Fillmore East, accompanied by a spectacular light show. Fox died twenty years ago, but not before taking the Fillmore East show on the road for the better part of the seventies, introducing countless college students to his "Heavy Organ" show. J. Michael Barone, the voice of the Minnesota Public Radio program "Pipedreams," is the host. (Riverside Church, Riverside Drive at 120th St. 239-6200. Oct. 8 at 4.)

MET CHAMBER ENSEMBLE
The chamber-music incarnation of the Met Orchestra, conducted by James Levine, will open its third season at Weill Recital Hall, with a program that features Strauss's "Metamorphosen," Schoenberg's "Serenade" (Op. 24), and Stravinsky's suite from "L'Histoire du Soldat." The featured soloist is the bass-baritone Richard Paul Fink, who will return to the Met as Klingsor in "Parsifal" and Abimlech in "Samson et Dalila." (247-7800. Oct. 8 at 5.)

SPECULUM MUSICAE
The contemporary-music ensemble opens its thirtieth-anniversary season with Tristan Murail's "Désintegrations," Xenakis's "Eonta," Varèse's "Ecuatorial," and the New York City première of Elliott Carter's song cycle "Tempo e Tempi," with Susan Narucki as the soloist. (Miller Theatre, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 854-7799. Oct. 10 at 8.)

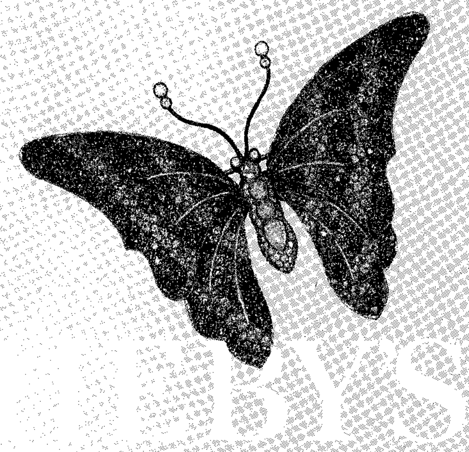
ABOVE AND BEYOND

"MOONLIGHT RIDE"
In the waning hours of the first Friday of each month, a group of bicyclists converge on Central Park for a spin through the dark corners of Manhattan's largest yard. If you're feeling worn out from a long week at work, don't worry: you can ride at any pace you like, since the ride's organizers (Time's Up, a nonprofit environmental and transportation advocacy group) post riders not only at the front of the group but also at the rear. These back-of-the-pack riders are called sweeps, and one veteran sweep is Dave Perry, a bike mechanic on the Lower East Side. "The sweep is like a marshal," he says. "If somebody wanders off, or if there's a flat tire or a mechanical breakdown, he makes it his business to find out. No one gets stranded. Everyone stays safe." (Oct. 6 at 10. For more information, call 802-8222.)

READINGS
Oct. 4 at 7:30: By Amy Bloom, from her new collection of short stories, "A Blind Man Can See How Much I Love You." (Barnes & Noble, Broadway at 82nd St. No tickets necessary.) ♦ Oct. 7 at 2:30: By the poet Eugene Gramm. (Riverside Branch Library, Amsterdam Ave. at 65th St. No tickets necessary.) ♦ Oct. 10 at 8: By Rick Moody, Mary Gordon, Peter Cameron, Mary Gaitskill, and John Edgar Wideman, from their O. Henry Award-winning short stories, in an evening celebrating the eightieth anniversary of that prize. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100.)

TALKS
Oct. 4 at 7:30: The economics professor Michael Zweig gives a preview of his new book, "The Working Class Majority: America's Best Kept Secret." (Brecht Forum, 122 W. 27th St., tenth floor. Tickets at the door.) ♦ Oct. 5 at 7: Bernard Werber, author of "Les Fourmis (The Empire of the Ants)," which considers the complex societies of the insect known primarily for disrupting picnics. (Tinker Auditorium, 22 E. 60th St. 355-6160.) ♦ Oct. 10 at 7:30: The Libertarian Book Club's Anarchist Forum presents protesters who were on the streets of Los Angeles and Philadelphia this summer; they will discuss the Democratic and Republican National Conventions. (Brecht Forum, 122 W. 27th St., tenth floor. Tickets at the door.)

WALK
Oct. 11 at 9 A.M.: Jeff Richman, the author of "Brooklyn's Green-Wood Cemetery: New York's Buried Treasure," leads a guided tour of the flora that's taken root in the final resting place of Horace Greeley, Leonard Bernstein, Samuel F. B. Morse, and some five hundred thousand other New Yorkers. For more information, call the Horticultural Society of New York, at 757-0915, ext. 200.



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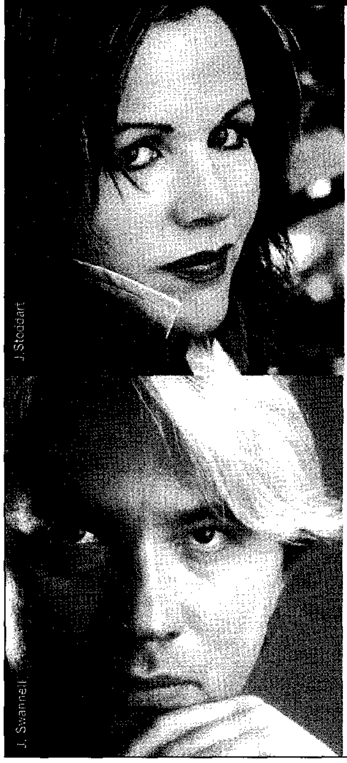

Gala Season Opening

Renée Fleming soprano
Dmitri Hvorostovsky baritone
Orchestra of St. Luke's
Mark Elder conductor

Program to include arias and duets by Puccini (*Madama Butterfly*), Mozart (*Don Giovanni*), Lehar, Gounod, and Tchaikovsky (*Eugene Onegin*)
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MOVIES OPENING

BAMBOOZLED
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Oct. 6.

BOOTMEN
Dein Perry, the creator of "Tap Dogs," directed this semiautobiographical story of a dancer (Adam Garcia) eager to escape his Australian steel town. Opening Oct. 6.

GET CARTER
A remake of the 1971 thriller about a mobster searching for his brother's killer, with Sylvester Stallone in the lead role. Directed by Stephen Kay. Opening Oct. 6.

GOHATTO
Nagisa Oshima's first work in fourteen years, a revisionist samurai epic set in Kyoto in 1865. With Takeshi Kitano, Tadanobu Asano, and Ryuhei Matsuda. In Japanese. Opening Oct. 6.

MEET THE PARENTS
A comedy directed by Jay Roach, with Ben Stiller as a male nurse who must win over his future father-in-law (Robert De Niro). Also with Blythe Danner. Opening Oct. 6.

REQUIEM FOR A DREAM
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Oct. 6.

TIGERLAND
Joel Schumacher directed this story of two Army recruits on their way to Vietnam. With Matthew Davis and Colin Farrell. Opening Oct. 6.

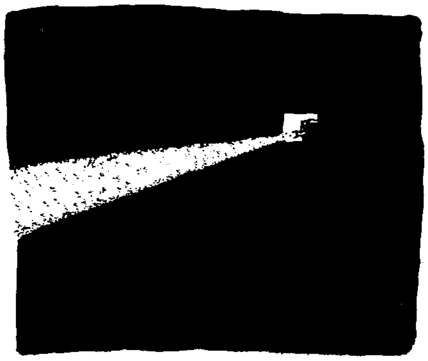
TWO FAMILY HOUSE
A drama set in Staten Island in the fifties, in which a would-be lounge singer (Michael Rispoli) falls in love with a pregnant Irishwoman (Kelly Macdonald). Written and directed by Raymond De Felitta. Opening Oct. 6.

YI YI (A ONE AND A TWO)
Edward Yang directed this epic drama about three generations of the Jian family, set in contemporary Taipei. In Mandarin and Hokkien. Opening Oct. 6. (Film Forum.)

FILM NOTES

ALL ABOUT EVE
Ersatz art of a very high grade, and one of the most enjoyable movies ever made. A young aspiring actress, Eve Harrington (Anne Baxter), intrigues to take the place of an aging star, Margo Channing (Bette Davis), on stage and in bed, and the battle is fought with tooth, claw, and a battery of epigrams. The scriptwriter-director Joseph L. Mankiewicz's bad taste, exhibited with verve, is more fun than careful, mousy, dehydrated good taste. His nonsense about "theatre" is saved by one performance that is the real thing: Bette Davis, at her most instinctive and assured. Her actress—vain, scared, a woman who goes too far in her reactions and emotions—makes the whole thing come alive (though it's hard to believe Anne Baxter could ever be a threat to Bette Davis). With George Sanders, Thelma Ritter, and Marilyn Monroe, who has one of her best early roles.—*Pauline Kael* (Film Forum; Oct. 6-12.)

ALMOST FAMOUS
Cameron Crowe's genial but remarkably undramatic account of his life and not very hard times as a fifteen-year-old rock critic in the early nineteen-seventies. Crowe's stand-in, William Miller (Patrick Fugit), a freckle-faced music lover, leaves home against the wishes of his college-professor mom (Frances McDormand) when he accepts an assignment from *Rolling Stone* to cover a mid-level band called Stillwater. He falls into an intense admiration of the good-looking lead guitarist (Billy Crudup), who is ambiguously friendly, and receives gentle treatment from a trio of groupies, the Band-Aids (led by Kate Hudson). Philip Seymour Hoffman appears as the legendary real-life rock critic Lester Bangs, who mentors William, and Jason Lee rants as Stillwater's infantile lead singer. Much of the movie plays easily and well as a record of good times, but there's no particular point to it. William is never put in enough danger—morally, spiritually, sexually, or any other way—to become a hero for us, and the music of Stillwater is not meant to be great. What's at stake?—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 9/18/00.) (Battery Park 16, Beekman, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Olympia I and II, Orpheum VII, Village Theatre VII, and Ziegfeld.)



BEST IN SHOW
Christopher Guest reunites much of the cast of "Waiting for Guffman" for another mock documentary; the target this time around is the cloistered world of championship-dog breeding. Guest directs and scripts with a loose, improvisational style (no dialogue was written down), and while some of the scenes glide along with a quick-witted tempo, others are awkward. The dogs themselves are splendid, and when the satire works the laughs are plentiful. Best-in-group awards go to Parker Posey and Michael Hitchcock as an uptight suburban couple whose courtship involved adjoining Starbucks franchises, John Michael Higgins as a preening owner who outshines his shih tzu, and Fred Willard as a chipper commentator who showers asinine comments on the proceedings. If Guest has a trademark style, it's the airtight earnestness he demands of his cast—there's not one wink in the entire film.—*Michael Agger* (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Square.)

BRING IT ON
A hyperkinetic teen movie that flirts with some interesting ideas about race, hip-hop, and the overblown world of competitive cheerleading but decides to smile and high-kick instead. The pert-mouthed Kirsten Dunst, captain of a successful suburban California squad, is crushed when she discovers that her team's sultry dance routines were stolen from an all-black squad from East Compton—a form of whitewashing which has a long tradition, from Pat Boone to Vanilla Ice. Without a real showdown, the film merely bounces along with a series of peppy but pointless scenes of young actresses dancing in halter tops.—*M.A.* (Battery Park 16, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, and Union Square.)

THE CELL
A man's intestines twirled around a golden spit; the pulsating organs of a dissected horse encased in glass; dead women pieced together as mechanical dolls—these are just some of the gruesome tableaux encountered by Jennifer Lopez, who plays a child psychologist who travels, via an experimental drug, into the mind of a serial killer. The plot doesn't make much sense, but the imagery is arresting. The director, Tarsem Singh, made his name in music videos, and his feature début is full of intense visual trickery; he relies on surreal contrasts (snowflakes falling on a sunlit desert) and clever cuts (from pouring milk to a body drenched in bleach). Since most of the film takes place inside a psychopath's mind, the normal, comforting conventions of suspense don't apply.—*M.A.* (Battery Park 16, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Orpheum VII, and Village East Cinemas.)

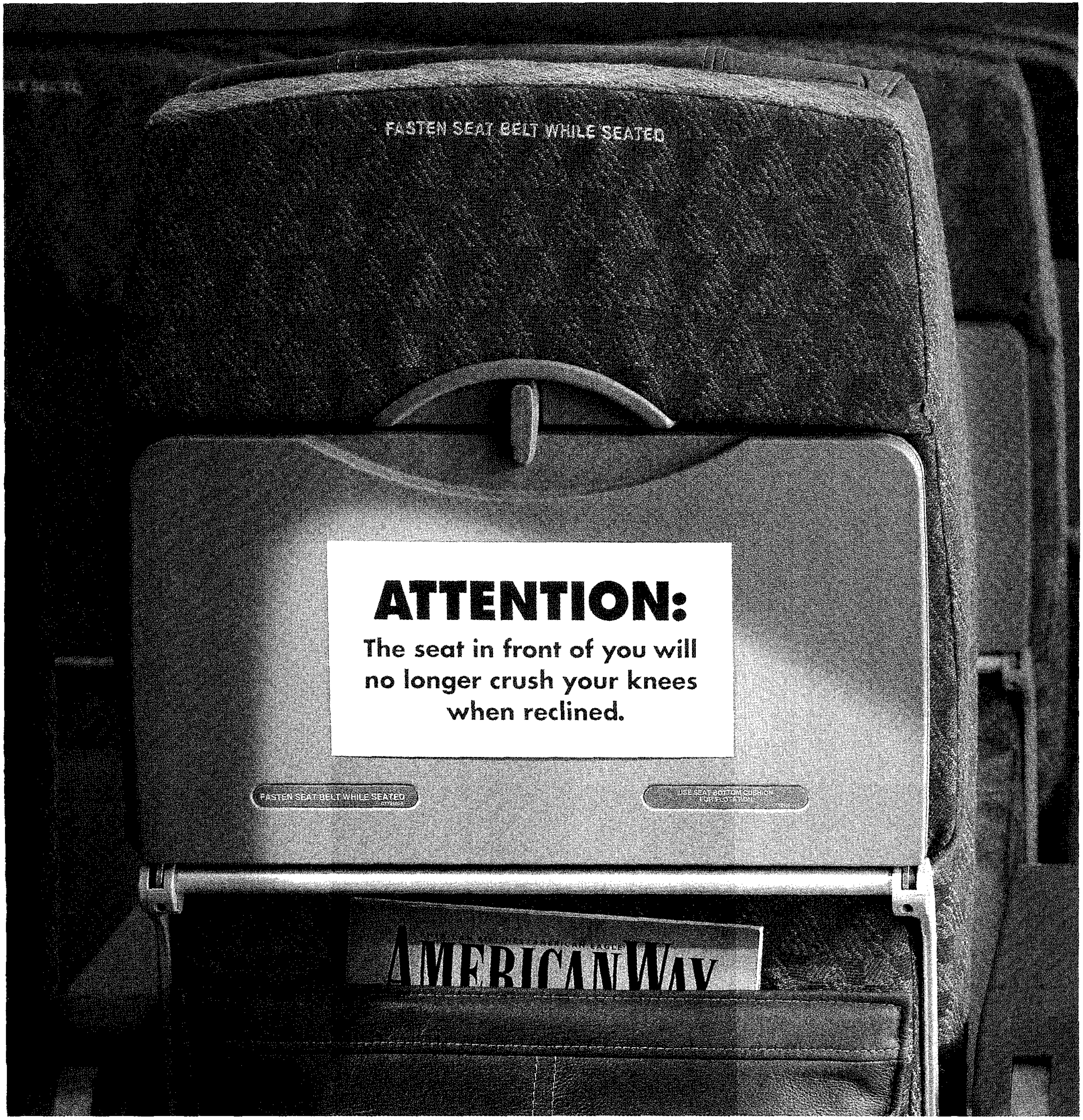
DANCER IN THE DARK
The new Lars Von Trier film makes his previous efforts seem like models of orthodoxy and restraint. Shot in Sweden, it's set in an America of Von Trier's own devising. Most of the characters speak with foreign accents, and the heroine—a timid, bespectacled factory worker and single mother named Selma—is played by Björk, the Icelandic pop munchkin. Selma has a congenital eye disease, and she is saving up to pay for an operation for her young son, who will otherwise follow her into blindness. When the money is stolen by a neighbor (David Morse), a vengeful Selma quickly conquers her shyness with the help of a gun, and from there it is a short step to the courtroom and the gallows. The film is unashamedly two-toned, split between a granular authenticity and a stylized gaudiness. The musical scenes—in the factory, on a railroad track, and so forth—have a deliberate, stamping awkwardness, overlaid with Björk's animal wailing. Since the movie showed at Cannes, many viewers have refused to stomach this unhealthy mixture, yet it feels laced with surprising power, and the harshness of the dénouement is unfeigned.—*Anthony Lane* (9/25/00) (Cinema I, Cinema II, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Union Square.)

THE FOUNTAINHEAD
Can people who see this 1949 picture ever forget the sight of the silvery-blond columnist Dominique (Patricia Neal) galloping up on her black horse and slashing her riding crop across the face of the tall, mocking stranger who had looked at her impertinently while he was using a pneumatic drill in the quarry? He's the genius architect Howard Roark (Gary Cooper). When his design for a public-housing project is altered, he dynamites the building; put on trial, he justifies his action with an attack on collectivism and the parasites of the left. Ayn Rand wrote the screenplay, based on her 1943 novel, and, true to her hero's principles, she wouldn't permit any changes in her megalomaniac, comic-book dialogue. King Vidor directed this paean to the individualism of "superior" people, made in a sleek, hollow, Expressionist style. It's an extravaganza of romantic, right-wing camp.—*P.K.* (Symphony Space; Oct. 10).

GIRLFIGHT
Diana Guzman (Michelle Rodriguez), a sullen, withdrawn Brooklyn girl who lives with a hapless, preening father (Paul Calderon) and an unformed younger brother (Ray Santiago), walks into a local gym where her brother boxes and at once feels at home. The trainers treat her with rough impersonality, which is exactly what she wants, and she struggles to turn her natural tendency toward violence—she's the kind of girl who hits people at school—into the skills of a boxer. This small independent movie, written and directed by Karyn Kusama, is an attempt at roughhouse feminist populism. As a director, Kusama blocks everything out too cleanly, making one point at a time rather than weaving the elements of the atmosphere together. At the end, the movie turns into a fairy tale as Diana falls for a beautiful young male boxer (Santiago Douglas) who adores her and her right hook, too. In a mortifyingly stupid scene, they are forced to fight each other in the ring. The movie may be naïve and underdone, but it has a new, live subject and, in Rodriguez, a powerhouse star who could go a long way.—*D.D.* (10/2/00) (Lincoln Square and Union Square.)

GIRL ON THE BRIDGE
A waifish young woman (Vanessa Paradis) attempts to drown herself but is saved by a knife thrower (Daniel Auteuil) who persuades her to join his act, where she becomes both nerveless victim and indispensable muse. He whirls her from one fancy location to the next, living on the slim proceeds of their success and gazing with avuncular disdain upon her incessant amours. The movie promises to be as steely as the flying blades, and the knife-tossing sequences make you flinch; but the director, Patrice Leconte, seems unable to match the coolness of his heroine, and the story droops into whimsy. Still, here is your chance to study the phenomenon that is Ms. Paradis—a huge draw in France and the beloved of Johnny Depp, who sports a similar set of cheekbones. In French.—*A.L.* (First & 62nd Cinemas and Village East Cinemas.)

HUMAN RESOURCES
For all those moviegoers panting for more films about restrictive working practices in the new European economy, this début feature from the young French director Laurent Cantet is a must. Jalil Lespert plays Franck, an ambitious young student who comes home from Paris to spend time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at the local steel-pressing plant. His father (Jean-Claude Vallot), who looks like a cowardly walrus, has worked on the factory floor for decades. His bright, inexperienced son goes straight into the personnel department, where the issue is one of restructuring the labor force. We all know what that means. The clash between innocence and experience can be seen coming a mile off, but that doesn't diminish the patient, doomy force of the plot, or Cantet's skill in digging drama out of such intractable material. The inevitable showdown between father and son is like a blow to the heart, and the movie ends in a sort of bewildered daze. Apart from Lespert, none of the performers are professionals; they are proper workers, and it shows.—*A.L.* (9/25/00) (State.)

NURSE BETTY

A calm, sunny comedy from Neil LaBute, who is taking a break from the nastiness of previous work like "In the Company of Men." That was cinema as vivisection; this has its spasms of violence, but its target—disappointingly soft—is the delusion of ordinary folk. Betty (Renée Zellweger) is a wife and waitress who sees her husband (Aaron Eckhart, wiping out memories of his scruffy biker charm in "Erin Brockovich") murdered in their Kansas home. In blithe mental confusion, she sets off for Los Angeles, pursued by the killers (Morgan Freeman and Chris Rock), to find a fictitious doctor—the supergroomed hero of a television soap. He is merely an actor (Greg Kinnear) who can't decide how to handle the unwavering force of her credulity. Zellweger strolls and simpers through the story, while Freeman falls in love with her from afar. LaBute wants to inspect their uncomprehending obsessions, but the film feels too flimsy to bear much satirical weight.—*A.L.* (9/11/00) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Battery Park 16, Coronet Theatre, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema 1 and 2, 19th Street East 6, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, and Village Theatre VII.)

THE ORIGINAL KINGS OF COMEDY

Eager to escape the constraints of television, four black comics—Steve Harvey, D. L. Hughley, Cedric the Entertainer, and Bernie Mac—began touring around the country in 1997, and Spike Lee, using lightweight video cameras, caught their act last February in Charlotte, North Carolina. The results are pretty much sensational from start to finish: you feel the warmth of a live show and the pleasure the men take in shaping the evening. Steve Harvey can be scathing in a palms-down, slightly fey style of irritated disbelief—reminiscent, in this one respect, of Jack Benny. D. L. Hughley is small and querulous; he burns with the shrill exasperation of the put-upon male. Cedric the Entertainer does soft-bellied dance steps and offers candid imitations of ordinary folks. Bernie Mac, tall, handsome, stentorian, and fearless, says he's past his prime in bed; we don't believe him for a minute, but it's a gracious admission of mortality. Most of the jokes are about sex and family and work, and about shame, too—the humiliations too deep for ordinary people to admit. Among other things, the movie is a tender-dirty love song to women, who, Harvey says, have been scandalously neglected by the hip-hop performers.—*D.D.* (9/4/00) (84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, 19th Street East 6, and Village Theatre VII.)

RAW DEAL

Cinematographer John Alton was the Moon King of the movies. No other film artist operated as skillfully as he did under cover of darkness, and this seventy-nine-minute film noir from 1948 shows off his night vision at peak power. In the rudimentary and sometimes ludicrous screenplay, a convict (Dennis O'Keefe) flirts with a lady from his lawyer's office (Marsha Hunt), then breaks out of prison with the help of his long-suffering gal (Claire Trevor). The jailbird doesn't suspect that his crime boss (Raymond Burr) has set him up for a fall. The ensuing chases and reversals permit Alton and the director, Anthony Mann, to etch postwar California in a vivid pulp chiaroscuro—the action is lit by flame and shrouded in fog. One shocking vignette, featuring a dessert flambé, prefigures the notorious scalding in Fritz Lang's "The Big Heat." Scenes like that, along with the ethereal score (the theremin is prominent) and Trevor's fatalistic delivery of the narration, give this film the queasy ineluctability of a horror fable.—*Michael Sragow* (BAM Rose Cinemas; Oct. 9.)

SOLAS

Pregnant and alone, a beautiful young woman named Maria (Ana Fernandez) has hidden herself in the ragged outskirts of a nameless Spanish city. Into this scene of urban isolation arrives Maria's mother, played by Maria Galina, and from the start she fills the screen with a radiant beneficence. Her village-bound, old-fashioned ways build a sense of community where there was none, and her unwavering devotion softens her daughter's jaundiced outlook. With each minute, the film lifts in spirit, and though it plays a familiar, sentimental melody it's still capable of generating some genuine pathos. When the director, Benito Zambrano, dedicates the film to his mother in the end credits, the effect of having watched a Hallmark card is complete. In Spanish.—*M.A.* (BAM Rose Cinemas and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

THE TAO OF STEVE

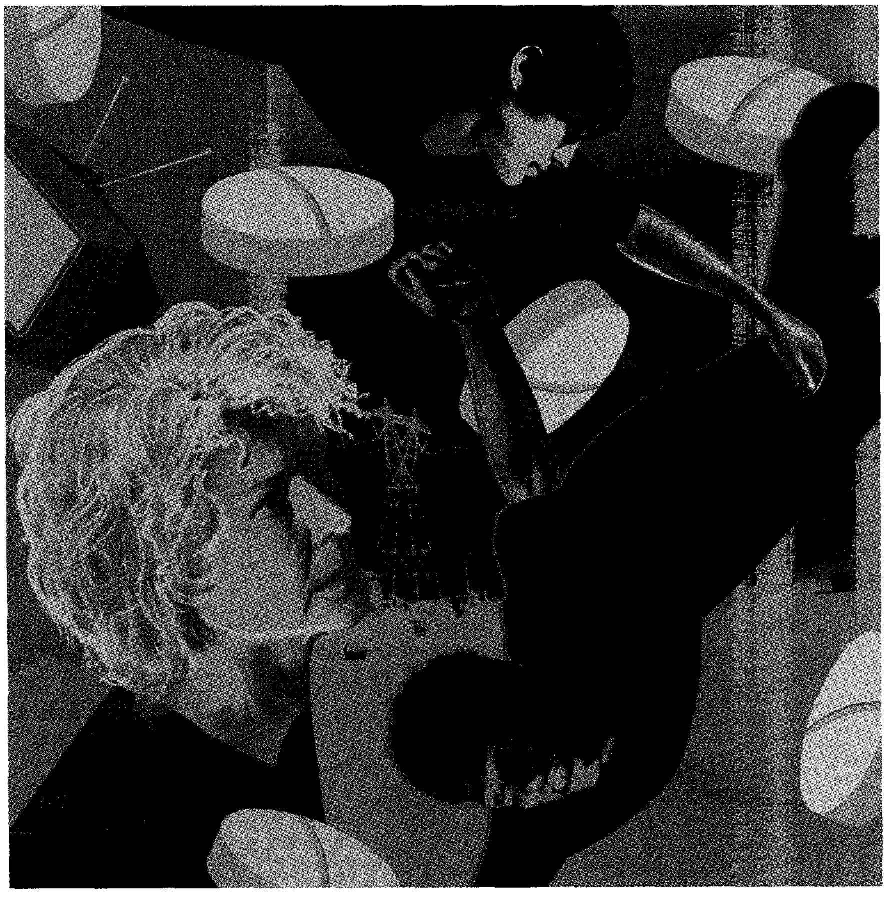
Jenniphr Goodman's comedy is set in Santa Fe, which comes across as the capital city of slackerdom; apparently entire lives can be structured around the art of the Frisbee. Donal Logue plays Dex, the portly and lovable hero, as a kind of threatless John Belushi—no one is wary of him or his bulk, and women, in particular, are drawn to his bed in spite of themselves. Dex has a book-fed philosophy of successful seduction, although the movie never really shows us his technique in action. Instead, we get melting hearts as he discovers that the cool-spirited Syd (Greer Goodman) may just be the woman for him. The story strolls along with ease, picking its way carefully between the nerdish and the hip, and the soundtrack is a memorable breeze, yet you come out feeling strangely underwhelmed. When did the movies last produce a proper Casanova, with the courage of his addiction?—*A.L.* (8/7/00) (Angelika Film Center, Empire 25, First & 62nd, and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

THIS IS SPINAL TAP

Plato and Aristotle held that laughter was a form of gloating, a way of expressing superiority and mocking the stupidity of others. Kant and Schopenhauer focussed on the role of incongruity in generating comedy. Though entirely dead, all four philosophers served as consultants for this 1984 mockumentary about an aging British heavy-metal band. Arguably the funniest movie ever made, the film—directed by Rob Reiner but masterminded by the Tap trio of David St. Hubbins (Michael McKean), Nigel Tufnel (Christopher Guest), and Derek Smalls (Harry Shearer)—is both a sure-shot parody of rock music and a lesson in improvisational brilliance. This remixed and remastered version includes fifteen minutes of new footage, but fans will be more interested in the eighty-three minutes of old footage, which include Guest's interrogation of a pimentoless olive, the least intimidating Stonehenge replica in history, and the legendary amplifiers that do, indeed, go to eleven.—*Ben Greenman* (Union Square.)

THE WAY OF THE GUN

Stylized, violent, nasty fun—not a movie for Senator Lieberman. Two good-looking young thugs, played by Ryan Phillippe and Benicio del Toro, abduct a young woman (Juliette Lewis) who is carrying, for a good fee, the child of a respectable-looking gangster. The boys head for Mexico with the pregnant woman in tow and various henchmen of the gangster in pursuit. The writer-director, Christopher McQuarrie, penned the acidulous screenplay for "The Usual Suspects," and here he furnishes a peculiar philosophical jargon for the men which is actually quite funny; the Fancy Dan rhetoric plays off against the hard, flat walls and opaque, shadowless surfaces of the Southwest. McQuarrie is an eccentric—a thinking man's brutalist. With James Caan, who gives a soft-shoe performance as a shrewd old boy who knows how to lay off at the first sign of trouble.—*D.D.* (10/2/00) (Battery Park 16, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, 64th and 2nd, and Union Square.)



Opening October 6, "Requiem for a Dream," directed by Darren Aronofsky.

JOHN RITTER

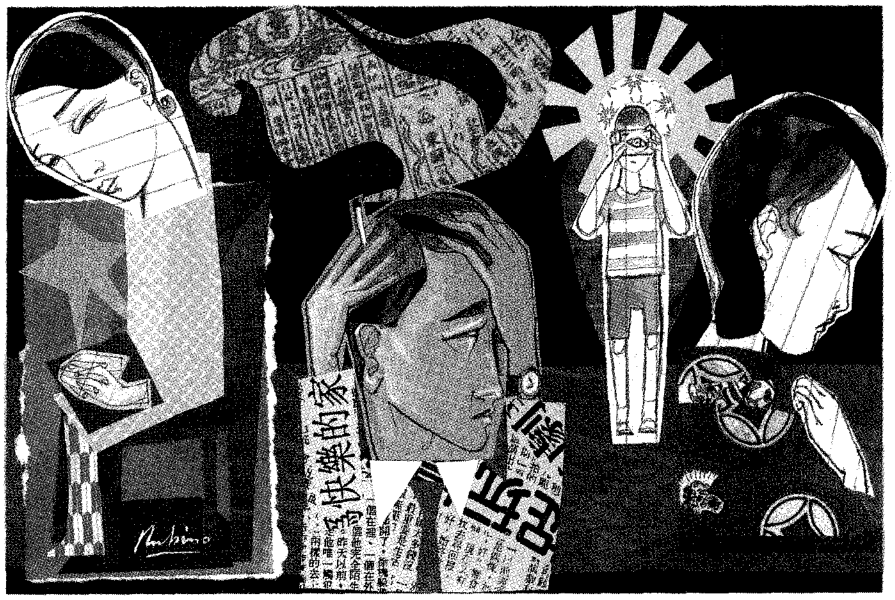
ALSO PLAYING

AIMÉE & JAGUAR
BAM Rose Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and The Screening Room.
THE BALLAD OF RAMBLIN' JACK
Pioneer.
THE BROKEN HEARTS CLUB
Chelsea Cinema and Quad Cinema.
THE EXORCIST: THE VERSION YOU'VE NEVER SEEN
Astor Plaza, Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, New York Twin, Orpheum VII, and Union Square.
GOYA IN BORDEAUX
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Quad Cinema.
INTO THE ARMS OF STRANGERS
Lincoln Square.
REMEMBER THE TITANS
East 86th Street Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, 19th Street East 6, Olympia I and II, Sutton 1 and 2, and Village East Cinemas.
UNDER SUSPICION
Chelsea Cinemas, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, 62nd & Broadway, and Village East Cinemas.
URBANIA
Angelika Film Center and Chelsea Cinemas.
URBAN LEGENDS: THE FINAL CUT
84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Murray Hill Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, and Village East Cinemas.
WOMAN ON TOP
Chelsea Cinemas, East 86th Street Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, and Union Square.

THEATRE ADDRESSES

Unless noted, call 777-FILM for show times.

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Art Greenwich Twin, Greenwich Ave. at 12th St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
BAM Rose Cinemas, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-623-2770).
Battery Park 16, West St. at Vesey St. (945-3418).
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinema I, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema II, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema 3rd Avenue, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (924-3363).
Coronet Cinemas, Third Ave. at 59th St.
East 85th Street, First Ave. at 85th St.
East 86th Street Cinemas, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Eastside Playhouse, Third Ave. at 55th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
Empire 25, on 42nd St. near Eighth Ave. (398-3939).
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
42nd Street E Walk, 42nd St. near Eighth Ave.
Gotham Cinema, Third Ave. at 58th St.
Kips Bay Theatre, Second Ave. at 32nd St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St.
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
Metro Cinema 1 and 2, Broadway at 99th St.
Murray Hill Cinemas, 160 E. 34th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 67th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Olympia I and II, Broadway at 107th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (688-3800).
Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th St.
Pioneer, 155 E. 3rd St. (254-3300).
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
The Screening Room, 54 Varick St. (334-2100).
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
State, Broadway at 45th St.
Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
Union Square, Broadway at 13th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Waverly 1 and 2, Sixth Ave. at 3rd St.
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.



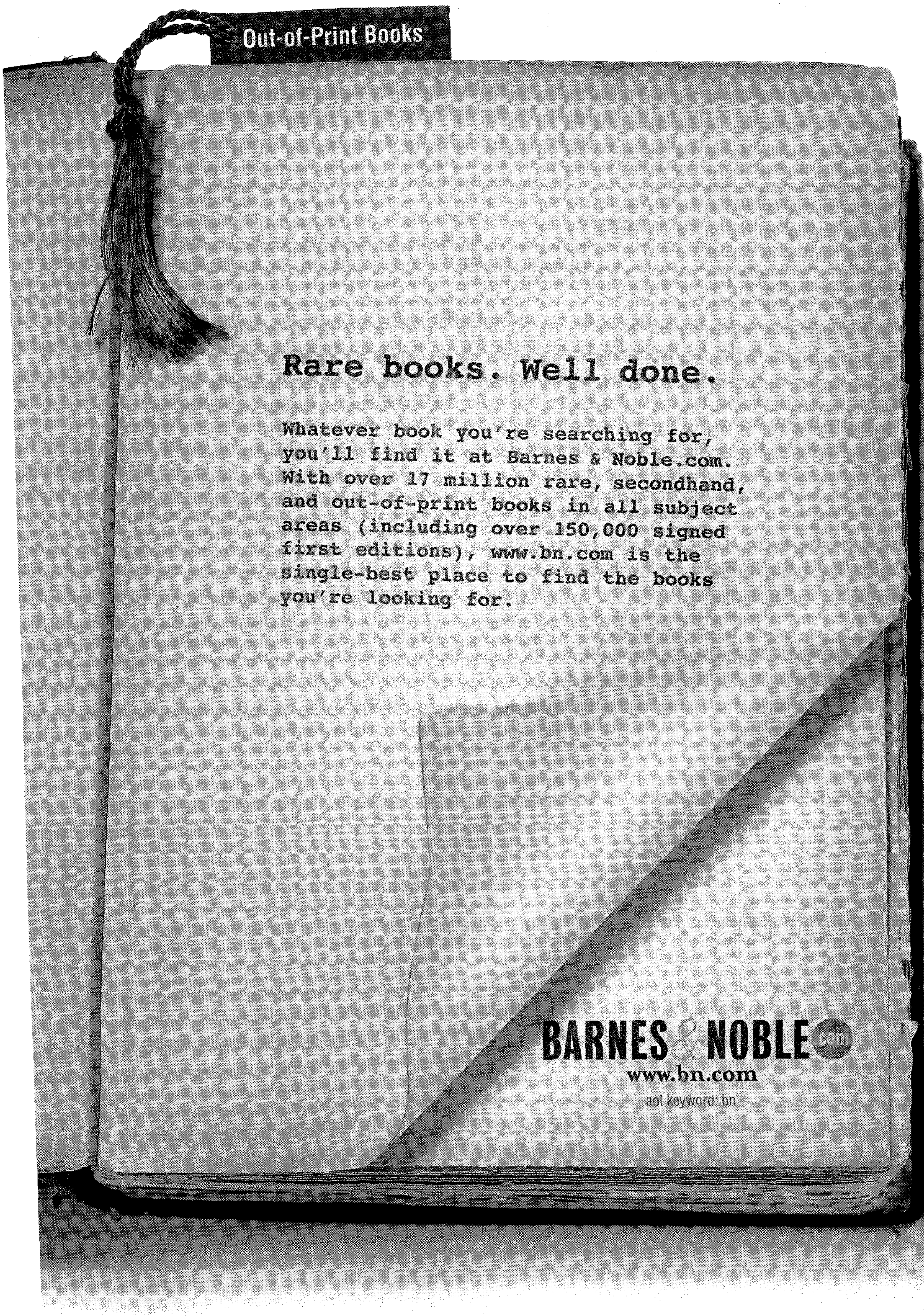
At Film Forum, Edward Yang's "Yi Yi (a One and a Two)" opens October 6.

CORNEL RUBINO

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Through Oct. 29: "Lon Chaney: Man of a Thousand Faces." Oct. 7 at 2: "The Wicked Darling" (1919, Tod Browning). ♦ Oct. 7 at 4: "Lon Chaney: A Thousand Faces" (2000, Kevin Brownlow). ♦ Oct. 8 at 2: "The False Faces" (1919, Irvin Willat). ♦ Oct. 8 at 4: "The Black Bird" (1926, Browning).
ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (505-5110)—The Richard Schwarz Thalia Film Festival. Oct. 5 at 7:30: "Hollywood Outtakes and Rare Footage" (1983, edited by Schwarz). ♦ Oct. 5 at 9:30; Oct. 8 at 2, 4:30, 7, and 9:30; and Oct. 9-10 at 7 and 9:30: "Citizen Kane" (1941, Orson Welles). ♦ Oct. 6-7 at 9:30: "Smash-Up, the Story of a Woman" (1947; Stuart Heisler). ♦ Oct. 7 at 3:30: "Dirty Heroes" (1969, Alberto DeMartino). ♦ Oct. 7 at 5:30: "The Sea Shall Not Have Them" (1954, Lewis Gilbert).
BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-623-2770)—Oct. 4 at 6:50 and 9:10: "The Magnificent Ambersons" (1942, Orson Welles). ♦ Oct. 5 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "The Trial" (1963, Welles). ♦ Oct. 6 at 6, Oct. 7 at 2 and 8:30, and Oct. 8 at 5: "Barry Lyndon" (1975, Stanley Kubrick). ♦ Oct. 6 at 9:30, Oct. 7 at 5:30, and Oct. 8 at 2 and 8:30: "A Clockwork Orange" (1971, Kubrick). ♦ Oct. 9 at 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "Raw Deal" (†). ♦ Oct. 10 at 4, 6:45, and 9:30: "The Nun" (1966, Jacques Rivette; in French).
FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110)—Oct. 6-12 at 1:30, 4:15, 7, and 9:30: A fiftieth-anniversary presentation of "All About Eve" (†).
MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—Through Oct. 15: "The Imaginary War," a selection of films about fictive battles. Oct. 6 at 6: "Wag the Dog" (1997, Barry Levinson). ♦ Oct. 7 at 2:30: "The Last One" (1972, Olivier Landau; in French) and "Savage Planet" (1973, René Laloux; in French). ♦ Oct. 7 at 5: "Akira" (1988, Katsuhiro Otomo). ♦ Oct. 8 at 2:30: "Invasion of the Body Snatchers" (1956, Don Siegel). ♦ Oct. 8 at 5 and Oct. 10 at 6: "The Crazies (Code Name: Trixie)" (1973, George Romero). ♦ Oct. 9 at 6: "You Only Live Twice" (1967, Lewis Gilbert).
THE NEW YORK FILM FESTIVAL
Lincoln Center (875-5050)—The festival runs through Oct. 9. Oct. 4 at 6:30: "Yi Yi (a One and a Two)" (2000, Edward Yang; in Hokkien and Mandarin). ♦ Oct. 5 at 6 and Oct. 7 at 9: "Kippur" (2000, Amos Gitai; in Hebrew). ♦ Oct. 5 at 9 and Oct. 8 at 9: "Amores Perros" (2000, Alejandro Gonzáles Iñarritu; in Spanish). ♦ Oct. 6 at 6 and Oct. 8 at 6: "Before Night Falls" (2000, Julian Schnabel). ♦ Oct. 6 at 9:15 and Oct. 7 at 6: "The Taste of Others" (2000, Agnès Jaoui; in French). ♦ Oct. 7 at 10:30 A.M.: "Eureka" (2000, Shinji Aoyama; in Japanese). ♦ Oct. 7 at 3: "Chronically Unfeasible" (2000, Sergio Bianchi; in Portuguese). ♦ Oct. 8 at 1:30: "Platform" (2000, Jia Zhang Ke; in Mandarin). ♦ Oct. 9 at 9: "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" (2000, Ang Lee; in Cantonese and Mandarin).
THE SCREENING ROOM
54 Varick St. (334-2100)—Oct. 6-12: Krzysztof Kieslowski's "Three Colors" trilogy. Oct. 6, 9, and 10: "Blue" (1993; in French). ♦ Oct. 7 and Oct. 9-11: "White" (1994; in French and Polish). ♦ Oct. 8-12: "Red" (1994; in French). ♦ Classic Hong Kong action films. Oct. 6-7 at midnight: "The Valiant Ones" (1975, King Hu; in Cantonese). ♦ Oct. 7-8 at 1: "Wonderwall" (1969, Joe Massot).
SYMPHONY SPACE
2537 Broadway, at 95th St. (864-5400)—Through Nov. 28: "Empires of Passion: The Cinema of Obsession." Oct. 10 at 7: "The Fountainhead" (†). ♦ Oct. 10 at 9:15: "The Red Shoes" (1948, Michael Powell and Emeric Pressberger).
WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (875-5600)—Oct. 7-8: "Views from the Avant-Garde," experimental films chosen as part of the New York Film Festival. Oct. 7 at 2 and Oct. 8 at 9: "Light Spill," a selection of short films. ♦ Oct. 7 at 6:30: "Time and Tide" (2000, Peter Hutton) and "Arbor Vitae" (2000, Nathaniel Dorsky). ♦ Oct. 7 at 9 and Oct. 8 at 2: "Beneath the Second Hand." ♦ Oct. 8 at 7: "Teatro Amazonas" (1999, Sharon Lockhart).



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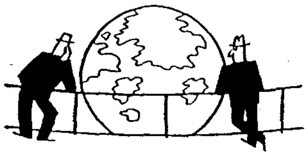
THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
THEY ARE THE WORLD

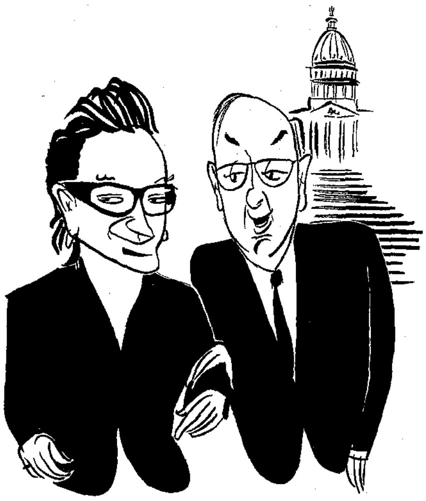


A couple of weeks ago, Bono, the lead singer of U2, visited Jesse Helms, the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and pressed him to approve the Clinton Administration's budget request, made earlier this year, for four hundred and thirty-five million dollars to help write off debt in poor countries. Bono, who these days seems to spend as much time campaigning for debt relief as he does strutting around the stage with the Edge—he also popped up in Prague last week, at the meeting of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund—described how, in much of sub-Saharan Africa, up to half of the children are malnourished and one in five dies before the age of five. Helms, whose enthusiasm for mononymic rock stars has hitherto passed unremarked, was so overcome by Bono's presentation that tears ran down his cheeks, and he was heard to utter, as a member of Bono's entourage subsequently recalled, "You can have your four hundred and thirty-five million dollars. You can have more."

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

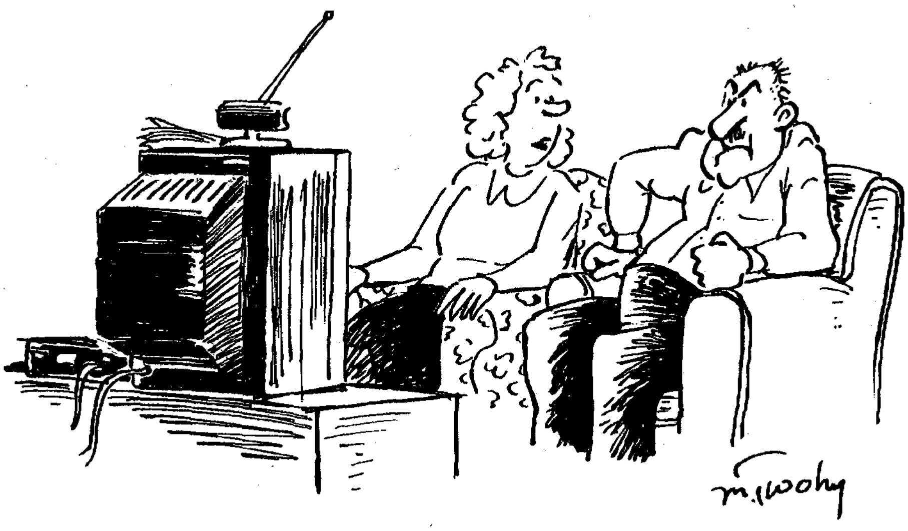
If this is true, it's good news. (Helms's staff does not recall the meeting in such emotive terms. The most a spokesman would concede was that the North Carolina senator was "touched" by Bono's remarks.) According to the World Bank, almost half of the six billion people who inhabit the earth live on less than two dollars a day, and more than a billion live on less than one dollar a day. Some of this misery is caused by incompetent and rapacious governments in the developing world, but not all of it. For more than two decades, dozens of impoverished countries have been forced to spend more money servicing loans outstanding to wealthy foreigners than on hospitals and schools. In many cases, the governments that took out these loans no longer exist, but their successors are shackled by onerous interest payments. Thanks, in part, to Bono and other celebrities who drew attention to the issue, last year the governments of the creditor nations finally came up with a meaningful plan to write off some debts, with the money saved going to poverty-reduction programs. The total cost of the initiative was twenty-eight billion dollars. The White House agreed to contribute less than five per cent, but even that was too much for Congress. Last May, the Senate came up with seventy-five million dollars. The House upped the figure to two hundred and twenty-five million, and there the debt-relief issue rested through the summer. It is now caught up in the election-year budget haggling.

This is a familiar tale. In 1962, roughly three per cent of the federal budget was devoted to development aid. This year, the share going to economic aid for poor countries is less than one per cent, which is just twenty-nine dollars per American. (The typical developed country gives about seventy dollars per person.) The entire aid budget for sub-Saharan Africa would just about pay for one new destroyer. Speaking in Nigeria a few weeks ago, President Clinton hailed the ten million dollars the United States recently committed to that nation's two and a half million HIV carriers and AIDS sufferers. In response, Jeffrey Sachs, the director of Harvard's Center for International Development, noted, "If he had stayed at home and spared the expense of the trip, he probably could have doubled the amount."



Bono and Jesse Helms

The real weakness of the debt-reduction initiative is, arguably, its mod-



"Lighten up, honey. You use performance-enhancing drugs!"

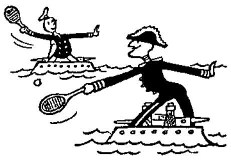
• •

esty. To qualify, nations must meet complicated criteria set by the World Bank and the IMF. So far, only ten—Benin, Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Honduras, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Senegal, Tanzania, and Uganda—have received any relief. The number is supposed to reach twenty by the end of the year, but even if this happens many of the recipients will remain heavily burdened. A new study by Oxfam suggests that Zambia, for example, a country stricken by AIDS, where one in eight children is an orphan, will be spending forty per cent of its government revenues on interest payments three years into the program. Tanzania, which entered the program this year, will still be handing foreign creditors almost a fifth of its tax intake in 2002.

Nevertheless, any debt relief is better than none, and the initiative is getting more ambitious. Countries like Uganda are already using the money saved in interest to vaccinate children and build schools, all under the purview of outside auditors. According to the World Bank, the plan could end up covering thirty-two countries and reducing their total debts by two-thirds. Of course, this would cost money, some of which would have to come from the U.S. Treasury, and that is a political problem—or, perhaps, a challenge. A Presidential candidate might even see in it an opportunity to go down in history as a man who helped to substantially alleviate world poverty, and to demonstrate to the rock throwers in Prague that America's defense of globalization is more than a self-serving sham. So far, neither of the major candidates has shown much interest.

—John Cassidy

TOY DEPT.
A SUB OF ONE'S OWN



You might think that the Kursk disaster would present public-relations problems for a company that aims to sell personal luxury submarines to adventurous plutocrats, but Bruce Jones, the president of U.S. Submarines, has his anti-Kursk spin all ready to go. "Anybody who is intelligent enough to understand what we are doing understands that carrying around torpedoes and missiles that blow up is one thing," he said last week by telephone from his office in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, where he builds subs for the tourist trade as well as for wealthy individuals. "But that is the only reason there was a problem with the Kursk. It had nothing to do with the structural integrity or safety of operations. The tourist submarine industry carries two million passengers a year, and there has never been a serious injury or fatality. Statistically, it is the safest form of transportation on earth."

That will come as a relief to potential buyers of the Seattle 1000 submarine, which is a hundred and eighteen feet long, can dive to a thousand feet below surface level, sleeps up to eleven people, and has large acrylic windows through which to view the icy depths. The sub costs twenty million dollars, and can be kitted out to its owner's individual design specifications. "If they want gold fixtures, they can have them," Jones said. "One of the interesting things about building submarines, as opposed to building yachts, is that we don't care about the weight. The more weight the better, because we have got to hang lead on these things to make them sink anyway. So you can have your granite countertops." (You cannot, however, have your Viking stove: naked flames in a submarine are not a good idea. Electric will have to do.)

There's room in the Seattle for a crew, although civilians can also learn to pilot it themselves. The trickiest part, according to Jones, is surfacing, particularly if you are in the kind of place where there are lots of luxury yachts. (Generally, boats on the surface, whatever their size, have the right of way.) "You have to pay close attention to your sonar," Jones said. The Seattle, which is being offered for sale in the Neiman Marcus Christmas catalogue, is, apparently, the ideal seacraft for people who don't like the sea. "I have a lot of friends whose wives don't like to sail, because they get seasick," Jones said. "But a submarine is perfect, because as soon as you go below the waves you are in a perfectly smooth environment. The finest Rolls-Royce can't compare with it."

You cannot, however, take a Seattle for a test drive just to make sure your wife won't get sick in it, because none have actually been built. So far, Jones has sold only smaller subs—exclusively to clients from the Middle East. "The Arabs tend to have more money," he explained. "We've had a visit from Ross Perot's people, and we have recently done a proposal for Paul Allen. But it seems that the Arabs are a bit more aggressive, as far as submarines are concerned."

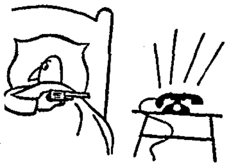
Jones gets many inquiries from hoaxers and deadbeats. One client, writing to U.S. Submarines on fake letterhead, tried to pass himself off as the Sultan of

Brunei's official buyer of toys. Another client commissioned a super-luxury sub, then, after the plans had been drawn up, turned out not to have the money to pay for it. That sub, the Phoenix, is also for sale; it may suit the competitive gadget fiend who is concerned that the seas will soon be crowded with Seattles. The Phoenix is nearly twice the size of the Seattle, and a sketch of it on the company's Web site shows a plush interior with comfy armchairs, wood panelling, and huge portholes that give onto views of passing tropical fish. The price: seventy-eight million dollars.

—Rebecca Mead

PLEASE HOLD DEPT.

THE CASE OF THE MISDIALLED NUMBER



If my telephone number were a poker hand, it would be a full house: two pairs, three of a kind. Visually, it is pleasing; the digits fall along one column on the telephone keyboard. This is not entirely accidental. When I moved to my current address, I did not wait to be assigned a random number. Instead, I informed the phone company that my brother was learning-disabled (he is certainly not), and that I therefore required a numerical series that would be easy for him to remember.

My phone number has cadence, but there is a downside. Callers frequently misdial it, and always in the same way. And so, for fifteen years, ever since I have had my phone number, Sarah and Herman have been regularly receiving calls meant for me. At least once a month, it seems, a friend reports to me that he has either hung up on Sarah and Herman's machine, talked to Sarah or Herman, or unwittingly dialled their number many times in a row. Even I, while trying to retrieve my messages, have occasionally phoned Sarah and Herman, though never when they were home. Oddly, I have never received a call for Sarah or Herman, which makes me think either that they are not as popular as I am or that my friends are more dyslexic than theirs.

A couple of weeks ago, when a friend told me that he had inadvertently reached Sarah and Herman's machine at 2 A.M., I decided I must apologize—for him and for everyone else in my wide telephone circle who has intruded upon them all these years. Also, I wanted to find out what Sarah and Herman thought of my friends. I felt sympathetic to this long-suffering couple and, in a weird way, cosmically connected to them. We were identical but for one digit. Perhaps they, too, felt a bond. After all, they could have changed their number to get rid of me but had chosen not to.

I imagined Sarah and Herman to be retired and short. They received few phone calls, I supposed, and most of the ones they did get were probably from their children and grandchildren. I wondered how long it would be before Sarah and Herman moved in with one of their children, perhaps on Long Island. Their number would be turned over to a churlish Wall Street type. Unlike Sarah and Herman, the new guy would hang up on my friends immediately—and, with a vengeance, star-sixty-nine anyone who hung up on him.

As it turned out, Sarah is fifty-eight, an artist, and beautiful, with shoulder-length gray hair and a face like the actress Viveca Lindfors'. Herman is eighty, a retired lawyer, and very large, like Ernest Hemingway. He had just come from the gym on the day we met.

We had lunch downtown, at Jerry's restaurant, not far from where Sarah and Herman live, and it seemed a little like a promising first date. As we walked to our table, Sarah mentioned that a man had phoned for me that morning. I felt a pang for all the calls I might have missed. We talked easily about a variety of topics, including how Sarah and Herman met (Herman bought a painting of Sarah's fifteen years ago and moved in with her five years later), bathtubs (Herman can't stand up in a tub whose bottom is curved), London (Herman's daughter lives there), papayas (Sarah had just had a dream about one), and Freudian analysis (a natural segue from the papaya dream).

And, of course, we talked about the integers we had in common. To my relief, neither Sarah nor Herman had been disturbed by the call from my friend at 2 A.M., because after ten o'clock they turn off the phone in their bedroom and let the machine pick up. At the end of the meal, Herman said, "Do you want to go back to the loft and see the Phone?"

I did see the Phone. In fact, it rang not long after we walked in. Herman wondered if he should pick it up or let the machine get it. "Pick it up," I urged. "It might be for me."

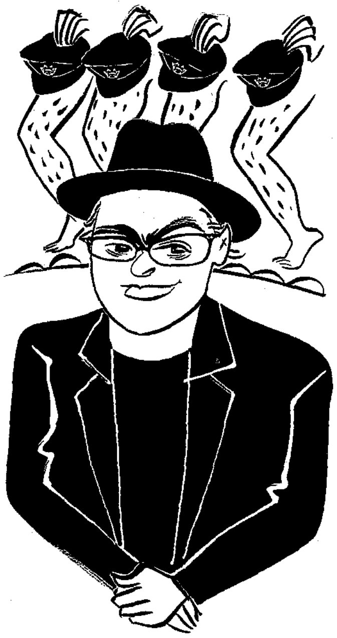
—Patricia Marx

THE BOARDS

MUSIC TO STRIP BY

Anyone curious about glamorous show-business jobs—and whether they're really as great as they sound—take note. On a scale of one to ten: Writing for David Letterman is a one. Putting out your own album is a ten. And composing a score for a Broadway musical is a solid eight.

This is according to David Yazbek, who has done all three, and whose latest effort—the score for the Broadway show "The Full Monty"—went into previews last week. The musical is based on the 1997 hit movie, about six unemployed men in the North of England who form a striptease act. As a selling point for American theatregoers (many



David Yazbek

of whom strained to decipher the movie characters' Yorkshire accents), the action has been moved to Buffalo, New York; Terrence McNally, who adapted the screenplay, was instructed to bolster the women's roles; and the music has been completely overhauled.

To do the overhauling, the producers hired Yazbek, a New York-based songwriter and record producer, who's been playing his clever, lyric-driven pop in small, downtown venues for the past eight years. (He also wrote the theme song for the children's show "Where in the World Is Carmen Sandiego?") "The Full Monty" soundtrack featured disco classics like Donna Summer's "Hot Stuff," but Yazbek's score is more traditional; he is sort of an Upper West Side version of Randy Newman. The music was influenced, he says, by Frank Loesser and Stephen Sondheim—and also by Captain Beefheart and XTC.

Yazbek is a compact man with thick, dark eyebrows. He recently turned forty, but he has the wise-ass demeanor of the kid in junior high school who had his own radio show. This is apparently what suited him for the Letterman job. Although he won an Emmy there, he found the whole Letterman experience draining. "Dave is the Queen Bee and you do what you're told," he says. "It's like being a chicken in a chicken coop, trying to squeeze out eggs. I don't know what Dave was like, because I hardly ever saw him. The chicken doesn't see the farmer."

An eight-year contract he had with EMI proved equally dispiriting. He glumly recalls being coached to write copycat versions of hits like R.E.M.'s "Losing My Religion." Working on the "Monty" project, though, has allowed him to be truer to himself. "There's a line in one of the songs that goes, 'When the beef comes out, you do the carvin' / You hate Tom Cruise but you love Lee Marvin.' Those are *my* prejudices. I prefer the guy who was in World War Two to the short little pretty boy."

In that number, entitled "Man," the lead character, Jerry, espouses some of those prejudices in a lovely rhymed triplet: "You're a man, and that's a bonus / 'Cause when you're swinging your cojones / You'll show 'em what testosterone is."

There are critics who complain that productions such as "The Full Monty" are contributing to the decline of Broadway, which is starting to feel more and more like a giant recycling bin for Hollywood. "It's true that when the producers approached me about the project I wasn't immediately enthusiastic," he says. "I thought, There must be some obscure Polish film that I can base some music on that will change people's lives instead." But now, with opening night just three weeks away, he believes that the story is tailor-made for the stage. "Someone pointed out to me that 'The Full Monty' is a sports story. It's not a story about stripping. It's about a bunch of guys who get together and form a team. There are ups and downs, and, in the end, they win. That's a hard formula to argue with."

—Lauren MacIntyre

POSTCARD FROM THE VELDT

A FIRST KILL

The first time I shot a living thing was from a set of bamboo shooting sticks stuck into a dust path that ran skimble-skamble across a farm in South Africa.

We started out before sunrise, hunting speckled guinea fowl from an open-air Land Cruiser. My sister, my cousin, and I sat in the back of the Cruiser with a Mozambican tracker named Chedric. A professional hunter, Van Reenen van Vuren, drove, sucking on boiled sweets and jerky. At a lookout spot called Watering Hole No. 3, my sister shot a water bottle for practice. My cousin shot a gray dove, which Chedric tucked underneath a tarp.

We drove on. Coming up over a rise, Chedric began to speak hurriedly in the pidgin Shangaan-Afrikaans that he and Van used with each other. He gestured toward three giraffes, their snobbish mouths visible above the trees. Chedric said, in a flickery whisper, "Zebra, zebra." Van drove on, calmly. About a quarter of a mile up the road, Van stopped the vehicle and asked which one of us wanted to shoot a zebra. I volunteered.

I loaded several bullets into the magazine of my father's rifle, and climbed down from the Cruiser's bed. Chedric crouched and picked up a handful of fine dirt, letting it sift through his fingers. We were downwind of the giraffes. So far, the zebras hadn't shown themselves. Van and Chedric began to move forward. I followed, haltingly. My heart beat fast, and my legs cramped. Chedric disappeared to flush the animals.

Shooting sticks look like the symbol for a tepee; you rest a rifle in the notch at the top. I did this shakily. A giraffe came first, followed by a pair of zebras, then two more giraffes. (Zebras often travel with giraffes to make use of their long-range vision.) Van told me to aim for where the zebra's foreleg joins its shoulder and the stripes form a sharp, upside-down V. I took off the safety and waited, "pushing beads" (Van's expression for sweating). Something passed through the scope. I pulled the trigger, and with the shot my zebra—all five animals, actually—took off into the bush.

There was no blood on the path. Chedric thought I'd missed. He, Van, and I walked around carefully, looking for a trail. My sister and my cousin stood in the path, with ashamed, accident-scene smiles on their faces. Then Van signalled me and pointed to a foot and a half of gut that lay in the grass. The shot had been too low, he said. The zebra, Van kept saying, would not live long. (The old riddle "What's black and white and red all over?" ran, absurdly, through my head.)

We called the other trackers. They all wore zip-up blue mechanic's suits and black rubber boots. One of them found a pebble stained with blood. "*Freshblut,*" Van said. I put it into my pocket, along with a bloody twig.

We didn't find the zebra that night. Nor did we find it the following morning, when we spent four hours wandering from dried-blood drop to broken twig. My father, who missed the hunt, had joined the search. "The lions have got him now," he said. But the morning after that, when Van pointed to a tree full of vultures, we found my zebra in a matted bed of yellow grass. The vultures had picked over him some, but he was huge and muscular, still warm.

—Dana Goodyear

THE FINANCIAL PAGE
MARKETS ALWAYS OUTSMART MAVENS

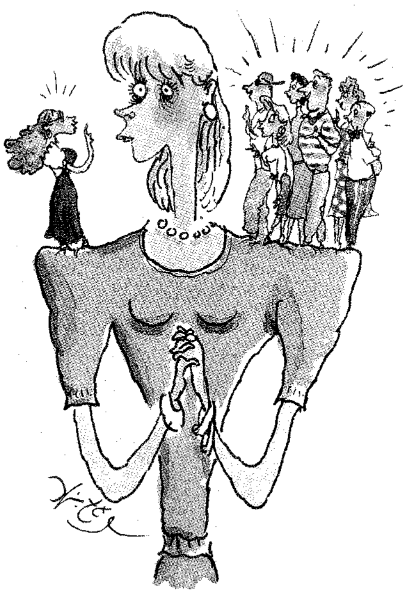
When you're a contestant on "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire" and you're trying to decide whether Nashville or Knoxville is the capital of Tennessee, you can appeal to two outside sources for help. You can call the smartest person you know. Or you can ask the audience to vote. So which would you choose: your brainiac brother-in-law or a random bunch of loafers with nothing better to do on a weekday afternoon than sit in a TV studio? Go with the group. "Phone-a-friend" gets it right two-thirds of the time. But the audience gets it right nine times out of ten.

The founders of Long-Term Capital Management did not have the benefit of studying "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire" before they launched their multibillion-dollar hedge fund in 1994. But, if they had, they might have better understood just what went wrong. Two years ago, Long-Term Capital, which is the subject of a serious new history by Roger Lowenstein, brought Wall Street to what seemed like the brink of financial catastrophe. Founded by the legendary bond trader John Meriwether, Long-Term had some of the finest minds in modern finance, and it got off to a phenomenal start. But in 1998, in the wake of the economic meltdown in Asia and Russia, it got burned. By the time it was bailed out by a consortium of banks, in September of that year, it had lost $4.5 billion in just a few months.

Not surprisingly, Long-Term's travails were held up as a cautionary tale of how markets break down—of how fear sometimes trumps logic. But Lowenstein's book makes it clear that what happened to Long-Term Capital in the summer of 1998 had very little to do with markets at all.

Long-Term specialized in esoteric trading strategies, which meant that most of the time there were relatively few people that it could trade with. If you want to buy stock in Cisco Systems, there are lots of folks out there who will sell it to you at a reasonable price. But if you want to buy, say, equity volatility (don't ask), as Long-Term did, there are really only four or five dealers in the entire world who buy and sell this stuff. And they all know one another. These people may have been financial wizards, but, as "Millionaire" demonstrates, if you want to find the answer to a question—like "What's the right price for equity volatility?"—you're better off asking a big, diverse group, rather than one or two experts. Long-Term didn't have that option. Its market was limited to a handful of participants and the institutions that attempted to mimic them.

There's an old B-school stunt, in which a professor presents his students with a jar full of jelly beans and asks them to guess how many there are. Their answers are always wildly inaccurate, but the average of those guesses—the class's collective guess—is invariably within three per cent of the correct number. A couple of years ago, Norman Johnson, a physicist at Los Alamos National Laboratory, sought to quantify this phenomenon in an experiment of his own. Using a computer simulation, Johnson built a maze that could be navigated via many paths—some shorter, some longer. He had a group of individuals wander through the maze one by one, trying to find their way out in the least number of steps. The first time through, it took the average person 34.3 steps to get out. The second time through, it took the average person only 12.8 steps.



MICHAEL WITTE

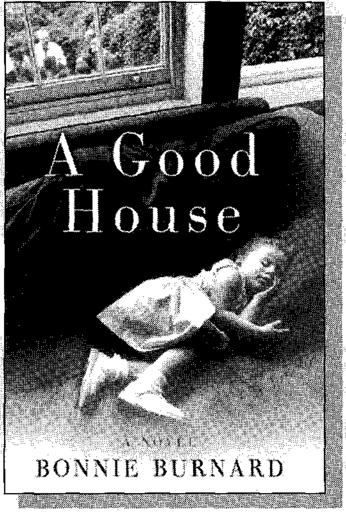
Johnson then took all the choices each person had made at every turn in the maze and went with the majority vote, to arrive at what he called the group's "collective solution." That path was just nine steps long. In subsequent trials, Johnson found that the bigger and more diverse the group, the smarter the collective solution was. In groups with more than twenty individuals, in fact, the collective solution was the best one possible.

Johnson's experiment helps explain why markets work. The miracle of markets is that a hundred million ordinary people, just by going about their daily business, end up allocating resources much more efficiently than would five guys talking on the phone, no matter how smart those five guys are. It doesn't matter whether the five guys are wearing golf shirts and working for Long-Term Capital or wearing Mao jackets and working for the Party. What happened to Long-Term Capital doesn't illustrate the perils of the market; it illustrates the perils of not having a market. Central planning is a bust when capitalists do it, too.

Of course, this runs counter to the conventional wisdom, which worries about the explosive growth of on-line trading. As more people get rid of their brokers and mutual-fund managers and start trading for themselves, the thinking goes, the stock market gets less efficient. The *Times* has suggested that the influx of inexperienced investors would create a situation that the market "cannot absorb." The message is clear: leave trading to the experts.

But that's not what the evidence says. As Michael Mauboussin, the chief investment strategist at Credit Suisse First Boston (who does a variation on the jelly-bean trick in the finance classes he teaches at Columbia Business School), puts it, the market is smart even when the people within it are dumb. Whether it's efficient pricing you're after, or answers to questions about the state of Tennessee, a thousand John Smiths are preferable to one John Meriwether. So, please, do open that E*Trade account. The market needs your help.

—*James Surowiecki*



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UNCHARTERED TERRITORY

Is there money to be made off the failure of public schools?

BY ELIZABETH KOLBERT

Anacostia, in southeastern Washington, D.C., is poor in most of the familiar ways. Much of the housing is decrepit, too many of the storefronts sell liquor or cash checks, and every few blocks there's a mural depicting, in exaggeratedly cheerful colors, happy, purposeful activity. To walk the neighborhood's streets and see any kind of commercial possibility takes a forceful and none too fastidious imagination. To look at its schools and see a promising new business opportunity takes a vision like Steven Wilson's.

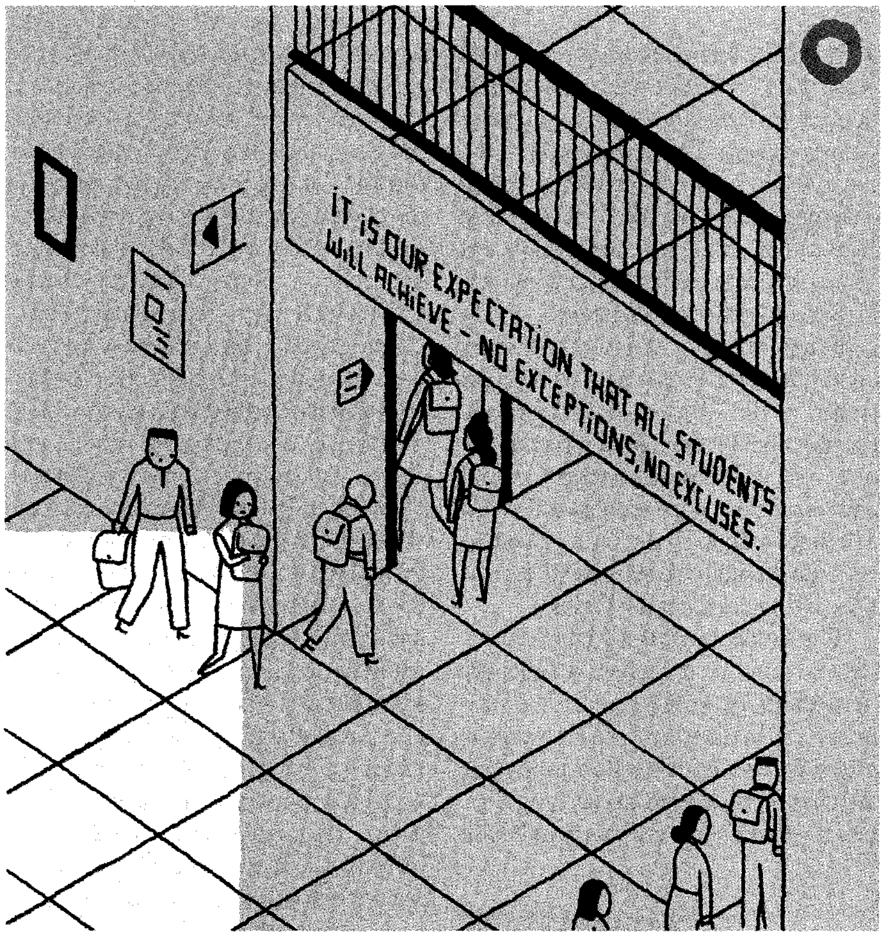
Wilson is a lanky forty-one-year-old with prominent cheekbones and close-cropped hair that sticks out in different directions, perhaps as a fashion statement or perhaps just as an accident of physiognomy. His background in education is slight. He has never taught in a school, or administered one, and his formal training is limited to a few courses he took when he was an undergraduate at Harvard. Four years ago, he founded a company called Advantage Schools, and the year after that the company opened its first venture, a charter school on the east side of Phoenix. Like the charter-school movement in general, Advantage has expanded at a dizzying pace. It now has fifteen schools: new ones opened this fall in Detroit; in Benton Harbor, Michigan; and in Fairburn, Georgia. A sixteenth, which is under development and scheduled to open next summer, will be in Anacostia. Within two years, Wilson hopes to be running thirty schools, almost all of them in inner-city neighborhoods.

I first met Wilson last spring, in the Manhattan offices of U.S. Trust. The bank is one of Advantage's backers, and, along with several major venture-capital firms, including Chase Capital and Kleiner Perkins Caufield & Byers, it has helped finance the company to the tune of more than sixty million dollars. Wilson was late to arrive, having just come from a meeting where he was seeking yet more financing. After we shook hands, we were shown into a conference room, where a plate of exquisite little cookies had been set out. As we drank the bank's coffee from gold-rimmed china cups, Wilson told me he thought that one of the reasons so many urban schools had failed was a misplaced emphasis on equity. A lot of public-school administrators, he said, subscribe to the notion that "the only kind of change that's good is change that affects every child equally"—an idea that he labelled "appalling," since "if you applied that test you'd never do anything."

Wilson argues that fostering competition among schools is a good way to get results—"People like to try different things and get a chance to demonstrate that their way is more effective," he says—and that fostering capitalism is even better. While most charter schools are not aimed at turning a profit, there is nothing to prevent enterprising businessmen from running them with that goal in mind. Wilson's goal is to run his schools in such a way that roughly one out of every five dollars spent on them goes toward operating his company.

Wilson is not the first to try to make money off the failures of the public schools, and he may not, in the end, be the best positioned to succeed at it, but his strategy is, in many ways, the most logical. Advantage's plan is to offer a low-cost education to the poor and, by exploiting the most recent educational reforms, get taxpayers to finance the entire enterprise. When it suits him, Wilson can speak as eloquently as the next guy about society's obligation to needy students; in a recruitment brochure for teachers, for example, Advantage urges them to "join the revolution" and "help save the next generation of urban youth." At the same time, Wilson is quite clear about the core of his ambition. "I'm an entrepreneur," he told me.

Last spring, I spent several days sitting in on classes at Golden Door, an elementary school that Advantage operates in Jersey City. The school is housed in a brand-new faux-Federalist building with arched windows and the simulacrum of a clock tower out front. Jersey City constructed the building, ostensibly as a community center, and now leases it to the company. It sits across the street from a huge parking garage and just a few blocks away from the local elementary school, P.S. 37. Eighty per cent of the children who attend Golden Door are eligible for the federal school-lunch program, meaning that those from a family of three, for example, have a household income of less than twenty-seven thousand dollars.


IT IS OUR EXPECTATION THAT ALL STUDENTS
WILL ACHIEVE - NO EXCEPTIONS, NO EXCUSES.

Like fast food, the lessons are prepackaged, with company rules: "Don't work ahead."

LAURENT CILLUFO

One morning, I arrived at the school in time for a second-grade reading lesson. The teacher, Brian Stiles, told the students to get out their textbooks; he himself picked up what appeared to be a huge spiral notebook. "Find lesson seventy-eight," Stiles told the class. "Touch column one. Word one is 'seagulls.' What word?" He snapped his fingers.

"Seagulls!" the students answered, in unison.

"Seagulls are birds that are seen around the ocean," Stiles went on. "They are sometimes called gulls. Word two is 'elevator.' What word?" He snapped his fingers again.

"Elevator!"

"Read, spell, read 'elevator.' Get ready." He snapped his fingers.

"Elevator. E-l-e-v-a-t-o-r. Elevator."

"Elevator! Beautiful. Everybody, word three is 'surface.' What word?" Another snap of the fingers.

"Surface!"

"Read, spell, read 'surface.' Get ready." He snapped his fingers.

"Surface. S-u-r-f-a-c-e. Surface."

After some more spelling and vocabulary words—"pirates," "instant," "handkerchief"—the children turned to a reading-comprehension lesson. Stiles was still working from his notebook. He asked a student to read from the text.

"You're going to read about big storm clouds," the student said. "Here are facts about clouds: clouds are made up of tiny drops of water."

"Everybody, I want you to look at that fact," Stiles said. "The fact is that clouds are made up of tiny drops of water. Everybody say that fact. Get ready."

He snapped his fingers.

"Clouds are made up of tiny drops of water."

Stiles had another student continue to read. "In clouds that are very high, the water drops are frozen."

"Everybody, where are the clouds that have frozen water drops?" He snapped his fingers.

"High!"

Much like a fast-food franchise, an Advantage school comes as a package, and to sign on with the company is, at least in theory, to accept this package in a McMuffin to McFlurry sort of way. Advantage students, whether they live in Kalamazoo or Newark, are required to wear uniforms (maroon on top, khaki on the bottom), to pass through the halls silently, in single file, and to obey the rules posted in every classroom: "Follow directions the first time they are given"; "Get attention the right way"; "Don't work ahead." The company issues a twenty-page Code of Civility, which lists ten Keys to Success, beginning with Responsibility and ending with True Friendship, by way of Perseverance and Truth, and it expects students to pledge, in writing, to adopt them. The curriculum is the same in all the schools and so, almost to the letter, are the teaching methods.

"Teachers have been socialized in schools of education, and taught to apply their own creativity to a problem," Wilson once told me, when I asked how he had arrived at Advantage's pedagogical program. "That's nice up to a point, but the idea that we should have tens of thousands of teachers all around the country trying to stumble upon the best way to teach reading to a first grader is kind of psychotic, right?"

The system that Advantage uses to teach reading is known as Direct Instruction. The system is also used for math, and was developed some thirty-five years ago at the University of Illinois by Siegfried Engelmann, an advertising executive who became interested in education after conducting research on how often kids needed to hear a slogan before they memorized it. A typical reading lesson, like the one about clouds, consists of a series of questions that the teacher poses and the students answer in unison, often repeating what they have just been told. There is rarely any doubt about what constitutes the right answer.

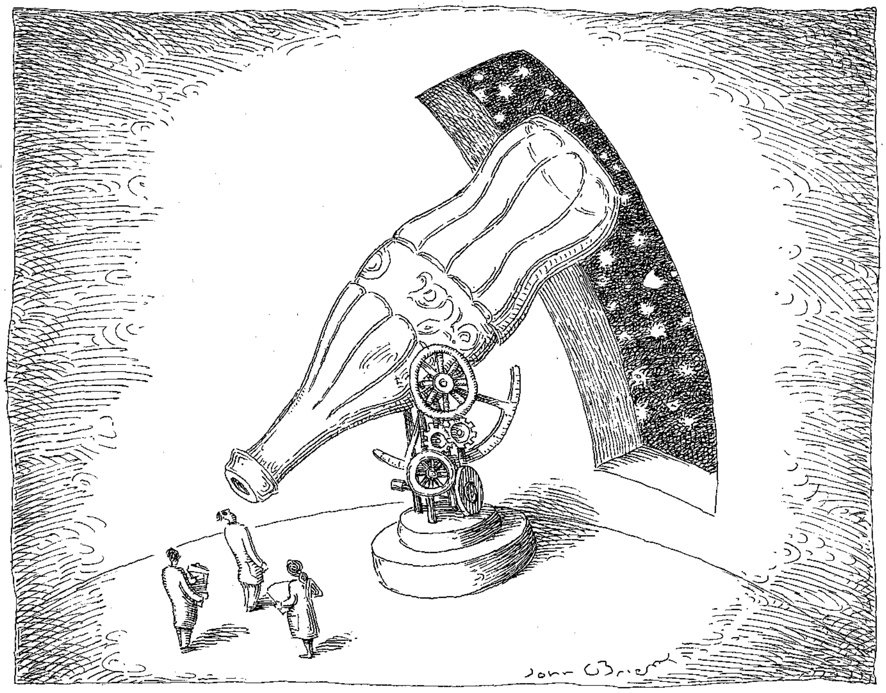
In Stiles's class, every time there was a break in the lesson the kids began chatting and pestering one another and rifling through their desks, stalling for time. To maintain order, Stiles used a system of warnings and punishments recorded on a wall hanging at the back of the class. The hanging had little clear-plastic pockets, each containing a student's name and several squares of construction paper in different colors. At the beginning of each day, Stiles told me, the green square was out front in every pocket. When someone misbehaved, the yellow square came forward—I saw this happen to one girl who refused, several times, to follow directions—and then, after still more infractions, the blue one, and, finally, the red would be moved to the front. Later, I saw the same wall hanging in the other classrooms I visited at Golden Door; it, too, I learned, was mandated by Advantage, as part of what the company calls its Classroom Positive Management Systems.

Stiles, who is thirty-six, has been working at Golden Door since it opened, in trailers, two years ago. Before that, he was a buyer for men's sportswear, a job he quit because he found it unsatisfying. He seemed like a nice enough person, and also probably a competent teacher, but since so much of what he did was scripted it was hard for me to tell. At the end of the reading class, Stiles showed me his notebook, and I saw that the entire lesson had been printed out for him, including the cues for when to snap his fingers.

Over the last eight years, thirty-six states have amended their education laws to make the creation of charter schools possible. This legislation has been supported by groups that favor privatizing government services, like the Heritage Foundation, and, in a more grudging sort of way, by some teachers' unions, like the National Education Association—and by politicians on the right and also by many on the left. Al Gore, who said in his speech at the Democratic Convention that he would never "go along with any plan that would drain taxpayer money away from our public schools and give it to private schools in the form of vouchers," has backed charter-school legislation, and so has George W. Bush.

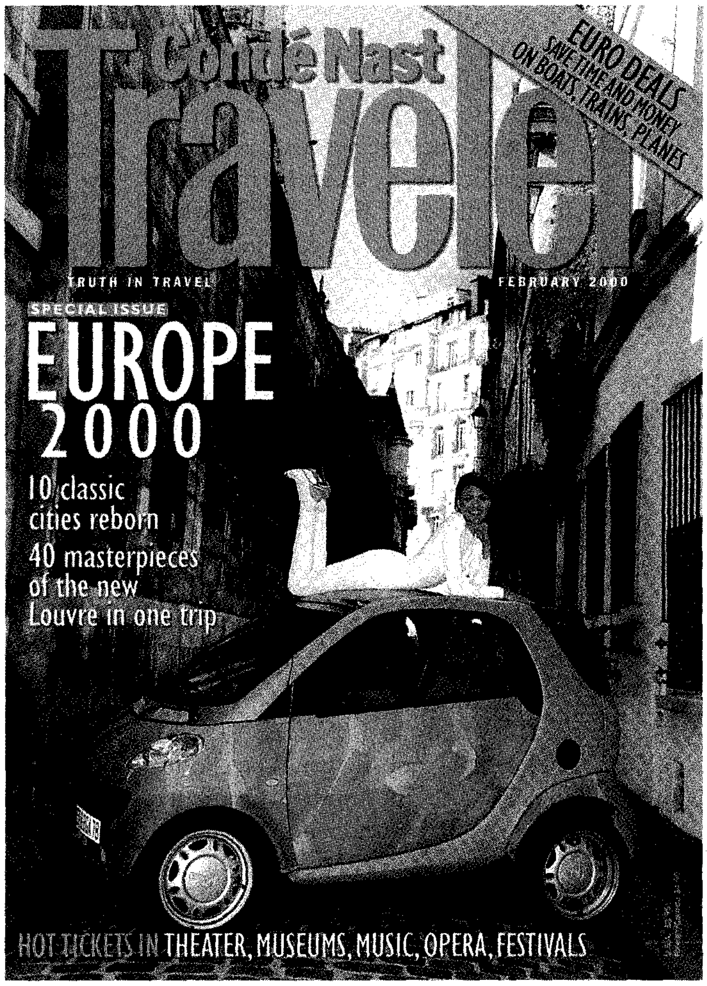
The sudden rush to embrace charter schools could be described as either the most dramatic development in educational reform since desegregation or as an essentially conservative effort to forestall real change. In contrast to vouchers, charter schools are supposed to expand families' options wholly within the existing public-school framework. A charter school is a public school that, thanks to a special dispensation—or charter—from the state, operates outside the jurisdiction of the local school district. Such a school cannot teach the Gospels, but for the most part it can ignore the local union contracts. It is free to develop its own curriculum and code of conduct.

Already, some two thousand charter schools have opened, enrolling about half a million students. The vast majority of these schools are operated by local nonprofit organizations, and the educational theories that guide them are as various as the communities they serve—which, according to charter-school advocates, is precisely the point. There are charter schools that stress "traditional values," charter schools that emphasize "project-based learning," charter schools that have an Afrocentric curriculum, charter schools that focus on community service, and charter schools for the performing arts. The notion behind the movement as a whole is that parents and teachers should be allowed to innovate (Advantage, of course, operates on the opposite theory), and that from the process of coming together to create a school a heightened sense of purpose will emerge, producing better educational results. Whether this notion is, in any rigorous way, true is impossible to know at this point, and the answer may remain unknowable. Charter schools are, in effect, a series of social-science experiments for which no control groups have been established.



Each student who attends a charter school brings with him an allotment of public-school aid, which is diverted from the regular public-school system in the area. The sum varies from state to state and, in some states, from district to district, with high expenditure-per-pupil districts, like White Plains, New York, paying as much as $11,609 dollars for each student, and low-expenditure states, like Kansas, paying as little as $3,820. (Jersey City pays $9,251.) The states specify how much money the schools will get, but they don't dictate how the money should be spent, or even whether it needs to be expended on students. Ideally, Wilson hopes to use fifteen per cent of the money he gets to pay for services, like accounting and equipment leasing, that are provided by his company's central

PURE PLEASURE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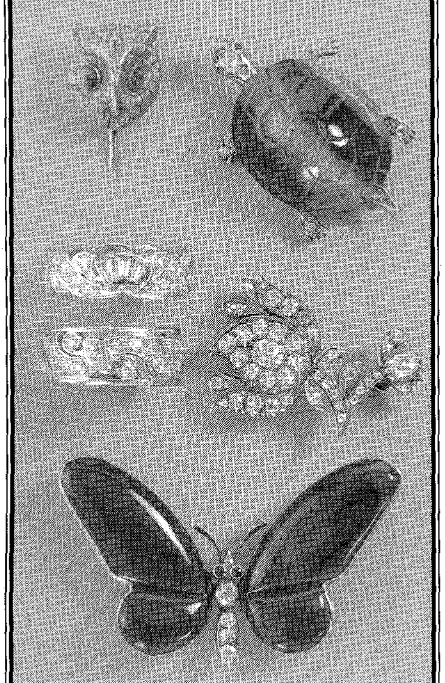

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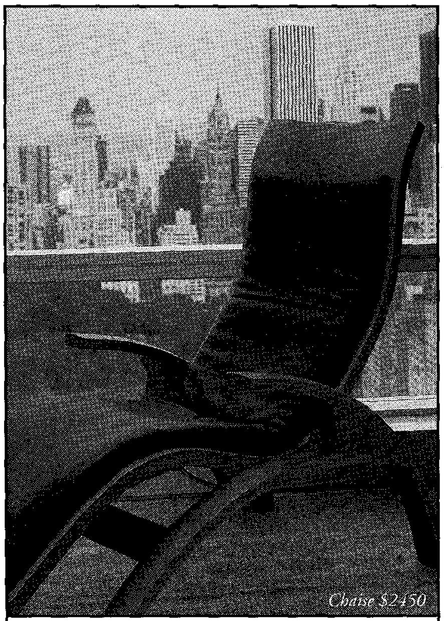

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staff. He plans to take another seven per cent straight off the top, as a "management fee" for Advantage.

Most states do not allow commercial enterprises to hold charters directly, but Advantage gets around this by finding local groups that will run a school on paper while in practice turning operations over to the company. This arrangement can work out extremely well, as it has in Jersey City, where Advantage has teamed up with the mayor, Bret Schundler, who is an outspoken advocate of school choice. It can, however, also work out disastrously, as it did in Albany, where in 1999 the company opened a school in partnership with a local chapter of the Urban League. An investigation into the chapter suggested that the group's president had misapplied nearly ninety thousand dollars in school aid. Over the summer, the Urban League and Advantage severed their relationship, and the whole fiasco has been widely described as a case study of how not to put together a charter school.

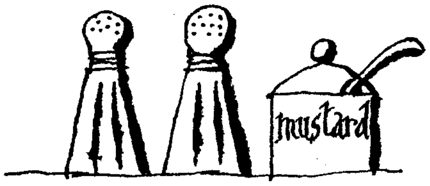
Advantage has its headquarters in Boston, in a suite of spare, loft-like offices near North Station. When I visited recently, the company was in the midst of trying to hire a chief financial officer, and Wilson had gathered his top staff for a search meeting. He sat on one side of a long table, next to the company's president, Geoffrey Swett, who joined Advantage after running a chain of dialysis centers, and across from its vice-president for human resources, Thomas Saltonstall, who worked previously at a rival dialysis company. An executive headhunter was participating in the meeting via speakerphone.

Six candidates were being considered for the C.F.O. job, and the group at the table went through them one by one, with the goal of narrowing the field. Instead, the meeting seemed to go in reverse, so that the one candidate who, at the start, had been on the verge of being dropped from the list wound up back in the running. There was a lot of discussion about what kind of background made the most sense for Advantage—was it experience in a regulated industry or experience in retail?—but Wilson's overriding concern, it seemed, was drive. "There's only two categories: energy generator or energy absorber," he said at one point. "There's no in-between. It's a binary thing." At another point, he observed, "The last thing we want is someone who brings in this culture of complaining. That is just radioactive." Several of the candidates, according to the headhunter, were a little shaky on Advantage's business plan, and wanted more information about it. No one around the table seemed to find this disconcerting.

Advantage is Wilson's third startup company—an impressive statistic even in the current business climate. He started his first company when he was twenty-one, dropping out of college in order to do so. The company marketed a kind of technology known as data-acquisition systems, which connect computers to instruments that measure things like light or pressure or temperature. A few years later, he sold that company and immediately started a new one, to develop control systems for automated-process plants. This second company, according to Wilson, achieved its goals technically but not financially. "I've experienced very modest success and more substantial failure," he told me. "I probably shouldn't reveal that."

In explaining why he believes it is possible to run schools that are better than the regular public schools but also cost less to operate, Wilson likes to say that a typical large urban district spends at least forty per cent of its budget on administration alone. This purported waste is essential not just to his calculations but to those of the entire for-profit public-school industry, which has received a huge boost from charter-school legislation. In a recent, unrelentingly sunny report on the industry's future, analysts at Merrill Lynch asserted that only about half of what is spent on regular public K-12 education is spent in the classroom. "We can't think of another service industry that exists where fifty percent of the money is spent outside of where the service is rendered," they wrote.

These figures may correspond to what many taxpayers suspect about administrative costs, but the experts in public-school financing I spoke with all described them as far off the mark. They noted that while it was possible to classify costs like counselling and school buses as



COUNTRY CLUB

Among the yellow leaves of old oaks,
six Canada geese parade as stately
as dowagers in feathered coats
across the golf course in single file.
This is my fifty-eighth autumn
and binding me more tightly each year
is the garment made of all the years before.
Is there nothing without its fixed point
on the line of cause and effect, nothing
without some history being hauled
along behind? Geese, grass, and trees,
I perceive them through the filter
of fifty-seven previous landscapes.
A golf cart rounds a nearby oak and stops.
Two men in bright-yellow slacks descend.
Spreading its wings, the lead goose rears up;
intent on their game, the men don't notice.
To own a thing is to try to freeze it in time;
the men don't doubt all this belongs to them.
They swing their clubs at the little white ball.
Autumn, autumn, how many will follow?
My sense of wonder is as thin as an old sheet
washed over and over; my sense of consequence
fattens above me feathered and huge.

—*Stephen Dobyns*

administrative or, alternatively, as money spent outside the classroom, this does not make them any less essential. "Is there money to be made here?" asked Jim Wyckoff, an associate professor at the State University of New York in Albany who has conducted an extensive study of New York State public-school financing. "There might be. But is a lot of it going to come from what is typically called administration? I doubt it."

At the moment, Advantage is not showing a profit; the funding it's getting from Chase and Kleiner Perkins is going toward easing the deficits at its schools. In this lack of profitability Advantage is no different from its rivals; with revenues of two hundred and twenty million dollars, for example, Edison Schools, the largest of the for-profit school companies, lost forty-nine million last year. In Boston, I was told that various economies of scale would allow Advantage to operate in the black when it reached its target of thirty schools; a few weeks later, Wilson told me that on the basis of more recent figures he believed the company *could* begin to see a return much sooner than that, perhaps as early as this year—but because the company will put that money toward opening new schools it will almost immediately go back into the red. One of the great discoveries of contemporary capitalism, of course, is that it is possible to become very rich without ever coming up with a business plan that actually works, and one of the reasons Advantage was looking for a new C.F.O. was to begin the process of preparing for an initial public offering. This, I was told, could happen at any time.

There is no lunchroom at Golden Door; the students take their meals in the classroom, under the supervision of a teacher. The ostensible rationale for this practice is that meals are part of the educational program—students will be learning while they eat. In one class I visited, I watched some third graders grapple with pizza. The food, courtesy of the federal school-lunch program, arrived in large quilted bags of the sort used by Domino's deliverymen. The students picked up trays, collected their slices, along with a

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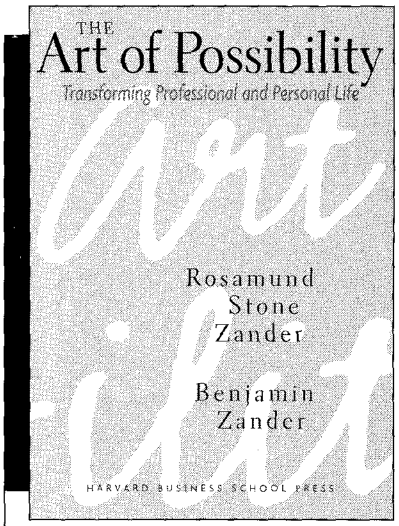
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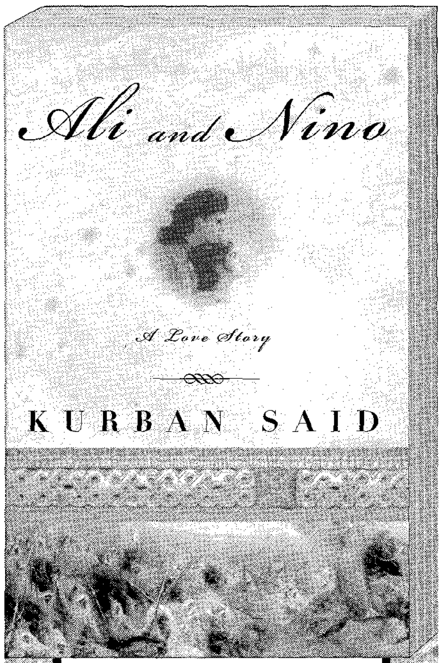

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cup of juice and an orange, and then went back to their desks. While they were eating, they chatted, held burping contests, and examined Pokémon cards. One student was using a utensil as some sort of catapult. "If I see you doing that again, you will not get a spoon," the teacher, a middle-aged woman, told him. When the kids were done, they dumped their trash in the garbage, stacked their trays, and went off to recess, leaving stray bits of paper on the floor. After they left, I asked the teacher what the educational objective of this particular lunch hour had been. "Supposedly, they're learning to speak quietly," she said, and shrugged.

Whatever its heuristic value, Golden Door's lunch policy obviously makes good financial sense. The school did not have to build a cafeteria, and now it does not have to maintain it, or heat it, or clean it. Instead of hiring aides, it simply asks teachers to give up half of their own lunch hour to keep order.

Other elements of the school's program are similarly equivocal. Advantage places a great deal of emphasis on basic skills; in Brian Stiles's class, for example, I saw a schedule for second graders. It showed them spending three and a half hours a day on Direct Instruction in reading, writing, and spelling, and another hour on Direct Instruction in math, which left just over ninety minutes to be divvied up, according to a complicated weekly rotation, among gym, Spanish, science, art, music, and history. Missing almost entirely from the schedule were the exercises in self-expression and discovery typically associated with elementary school: the illustrated reports that get tacked on the walls, or the scraggly seedlings groping toward the windows. In Stiles's classroom, there were some simple cutouts of hot-air balloons hanging from the ceiling; these were the only student-made decorations in the room, and he told me it had been difficult, given the rigors of the curriculum, to find the time to make them.

Advantage's emphasis could reflect a pedagogical decision about what skills matter most in life or, just as plausibly, an economic calculation. The pledge that Advantage makes when it launches a new school is that, over five years, the standardized-test results of virtually every student will improve, though by how much varies substantially according to how well, or how badly, the student scored initially. (According to figures provided to me by the company, reading scores at Golden Door last year did improve significantly for the youngest children but much less so for older children.) Since it's very difficult to measure progress on intangibles like creativity or independent thinking, in a school that is run as a business it probably doesn't make much sense to devote a whole lot of resources to them.

As for Direct Instruction, Wilson and other Advantage executives told me that the method had been chosen because it was demonstrably the most effective. In its literature, the company asserts that research has "overwhelmingly supported the superiority of DI over all other programs," a claim that, to say the least, exaggerates the supporting data. At the same time, Advantage's reliance on Direct Instruction follows altogether logically from the company's efforts to keep salary costs down. Most of the teachers I met at Golden Door were inexperienced, and a few told me that they had tried to get jobs in public-school systems but, for one reason or another, had been unable to do so. Direct Instruction leaves so little to the teacher's discretion that classroom experience, not to say talent or imagination, seems almost beside the point. "Advantage could train a monkey," one teacher told me.

When I asked Wilson about what I saw as the ambiguity of the company's educational model, he told me that it was "no different, really, from that of any other school, because every school has limited resources, has a budget." In terms of the quality of education, he said he did not believe that Advantage had made any meaningful sacrifices in its efforts to economize. "Frankly, some programs are just much, much more efficient, even though people don't like to hear that word in education."

I talked to dozens of students at Golden Door about their experiences, and when word got around that I was a reporter more kids sought me out, eager to relate their stories. A few of the kids had complaints. One serious-looking fifth grader told me that she missed the regular public school she used to attend. "The other school had more activities and projects and trips," she said, adding that she had once won a prize for a project on a woman she admired. Many more, though, said they were happy. Another fifth grader, with pigtails, told me, "I love this school. I was about to stay back, and this school gave me another chance."

Over and over again, kids talked about violence they had seen, or even participated in, at their previous schools, and how much more secure they felt at Golden Door. "I like this school because they have rules about not touching the other kids," one girl told me. "I feel more protected." Last spring, Golden Door had enough room to admit only one new class of kindergartners. Posted near the main entrance was a roster of children who had been wait-listed; a hundred and eighty-one names were on it.

Wilson doesn't pretend that the program he is providing for students in Jersey City and in Detroit is one that would hold much appeal in wealthier districts like Summit or Bloomfield Hills. "We shouldn't be struggling to find one approach that's right for everybody," he told me. "The needs of our urban students resulting from their backgrounds and their previous educational and social deprivations in some cases are very different from the needs of the son or daughter of an affluent suburban parent."

If one considers the public schools a primary institution of democracy, it is hard not to be discomfited by this separate-but-not-altogether-equal philosophy. Everything that I saw in Advantage's Boston office—the emphasis on drive and risk-taking and innovation—reflected a corporate culture that was fundamentally at odds with the cookie-cutter, don't-work-ahead design of its schools. Answering on command and respecting authority are not entrepreneurial virtues, though they do have a place farther down the economic order. It struck me as not insignificant that, while Advantage schools serve mostly black and Hispanic kids, everyone I met in the corporate headquarters, except for a single receptionist, was white.

Yet dwelling on this discomfort may itself be a luxury. The choice that parents in the inner city are confronting is not one about abstract ideals, or even about the appropriate role of profit in public education; it is a choice for the most part between dysfunctional public schools and some alternative—any alternative. And if these parents choose to send their kids to Advantage, if only because they feel that the kids will be safer there, who, in the end, can blame them? ♦

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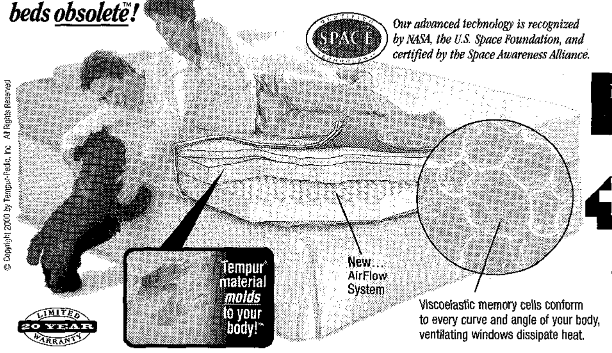

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AFTER THE PAGEANT

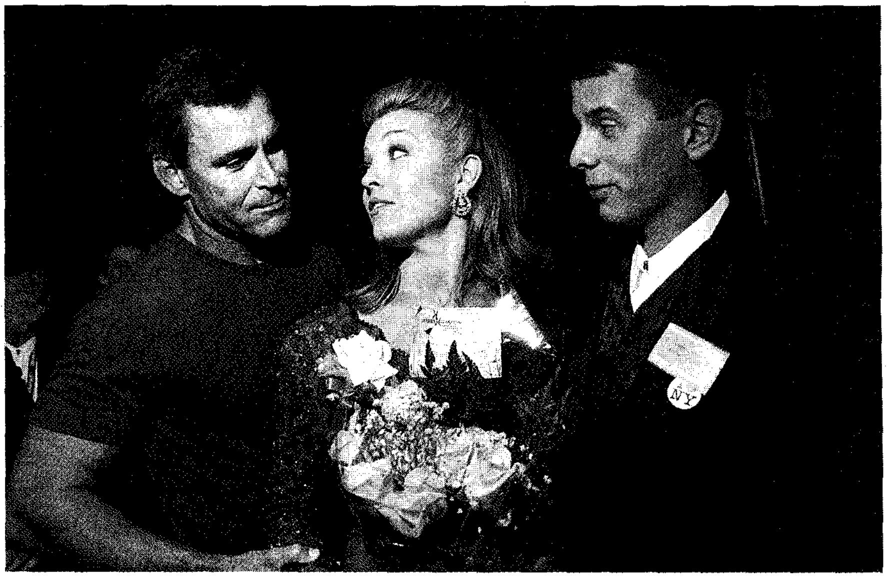
What becomes of an also-ran in the Miss America contest?

BY LILLIAN ROSS

The face of Brandi Burkhardt, an even-featured, blond-haired, green-eyed twenty-year-old student at N.Y.U.'s Tisch School of the Arts, was pictured last September as Miss New York State in the ten-dollar program for the 1999 Miss America Pageant. The program contained a two-page array of the fifty-one remarkably uniform faces in the competition, with measured arcs drawn above their eyes, flawless teeth exposed in mathematically exact smiles, and cheery expressions that revealed nothing. But in the proceedings that followed, as the fifty-one Misses morphed into swimsuit models and interviewees and singers and dancers and instrumentalists, they did reveal something quite remarkable: their determination, win or lose, to be altered in their lives.

"Even if I don't win," Brandi Burkhardt said to me in Atlantic City, just before last year's pageant began, "I don't come away with nothing."

Brandi Burkhardt didn't come away with the crown. Heather French, Miss Kentucky—a chesty brunette who, since the age of nine, had been in at least forty beauty pageants—became Miss America 2000. But the trajectory of Miss New York State's life since her bout with the Miss America Pageant has been exceptionally surprising.



Brandi Burkhardt, with her mentor, Paul Brown (left), and her boyfriend, Randy, last fall. "I'm a hide-behind-my-smile person." Photograph by Amy Arbus.

The pageant contestants, past and present, often compare themselves to a sorority. Brandi said she subscribed wholly to the guidelines—quoted in one of the Miss America Organization's many publications—of Heather Whitestone, the first deaf Miss America (1995): "Have a positive attitude. Believe in your dream. Face your obstacles. Work hard. Build a support team." Much older Miss Americas had absorbed Heather Whitestone's guidelines decades before Heather Whitestone proclaimed them as her own. "Miss America gave me my life," says BeBe Shopp, Miss America 1948. Shopp, who was a vibraharp player from Hopkins, Minnesota, took her scholarship money—five thousand dollars, a tenth of the prize today—and went to the Manhattan School of Music. She hung up the vibraharp years ago, but she has rarely missed returning to the Miss America event in fifty years. BeBe, who is a big woman and still regal, was one of the seven judges who awarded Brandi Burkhardt her crown in the New York State contest.

At the beginning, Brandi was at one with her fellow-contestants, bolstered by her own "support team," and also, like many of them, by her Christian faith. Her pocket New Testament, well worn and with passages marked throughout in pen and pencil, was constantly at hand. She even found time during the competition to inaugurate and lead a regular Bible-study class.

Brandi is from Pasadena, Maryland, a town with a population of less than seven thousand. Her parents divorced when she was two, and she was raised by her mother. She started competing at the age of fourteen. "I did it for my mom; my mom has been a strong force in my life," she told me last year. She had just become Miss New York State in the pageant that followed her coronation, three months earlier, as Miss Manhattan. "It's always been Mom and me," she said, speaking in her noncommittal, somewhat breathless manner, the same light, pleasant, unguarded tone she assumed whether she was talking about eating an apple or her opposition to abortion. "I'm the kind of person who likes to oblige others. I like making other people happy. Once I got into it, though, I think I wanted to do it. I wanted to be Miss America."

These days, the winner of the Miss America title goes home with at least fifty thousand dollars in scholarship money, plus opportunities to earn hundreds of thousands of dollars in fees for various public appearances. Runners-up and semifinalists are given, in descending placement order, from forty thousand dollars to ten thousand dollars; then there is a group of prizes (ten thousand, two thousand, and a thousand dollars) termed "Quality of Life" awards. Brandi was awarded, in addition to the automatic three thousand dollars that every nonranking contestant received last year, only another thousand, which was given to each of ten "non-finalist talent winners."

"It's not just the money," Brandi said. "It's all so fulfilling. For the first time, people were asking me for my ideas. I liked the attention." With a thousand-dollar prize that she had won as Miss Maryland Teen U.S.A., in 1997, Brandi spent a year at the University of Maryland and then enrolled at N.Y.U. "I wanted to be in New York ever since I was ten, when my mom brought me here on a bus trip, and we went to Radio City Music Hall," she said. At N.Y.U., she pursued a B.F.A. in Drama. Her ambition was to do musical comedy on Broadway. Her role model was Julie Andrews. "I love her," she said. "I want to sing like Julie Andrews and be like Julie Andrews. I can see myself singing her songs."

As a New Yorker, Brandi was eligible to compete for the crown of Miss Manhattan. The executive director of that local pageant was forty-three-year-old Paul Brown, from Birmingham, Alabama. Brown is a fitness fanatic, with impressive muscles and a deep year-round tan. He is a nonpracticing radiologist who now consults for a pharmaceutical company. He worked as a model to put himself through medical school. He has been volunteering his time to pageants for twenty years. "Paul loves the pageant, and when I won Miss Manhattan he did everything to help me prepare for the Miss New York State Pageant," Brandi said. "I owe so much to Paul. He rehearsed me with questions and answers, like 'Why do you want to be Miss New York State?' Answer: 'For the scholarship program and an avenue for pursuing my career.' Or, 'Should we interfere in Kosovo?' Answer: 'I can't imagine not interfering.' "

In the Miss Manhattan Pageant, Brandi had sung "Ice Cream," from "She Loves Me," but Paul advised her to sing "Take Me as I Am," from "Jekyll & Hyde," for Miss New York State. He accompanied Brandi to the competition, in Watertown, along with her boyfriend, Randy Clifford, who was a pre-law student from Maryland, and her mother, her aunt, her uncle, and her grandmother. "And I won!" Brandi said. "I got the crown. It's silvery metal with four points and rhinestones. I won a ninety-three-hundred-dollar scholarship. They told me that I'd be appearing at four events a week during my year, and that I'd be earning two hundred dollars for each event. But it hasn't been anything close to that. I've done things like giving out awards to Fort Drum soldiers and appearing at an antique-auto show. I think I earned about eighteen hundred

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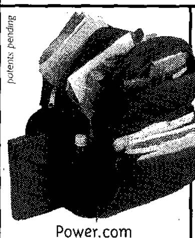

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dollars for the entire year. And Miss New York State, I learned, carries her own luggage," she said blithely. "But I didn't have time to do much, anyway. From July to September, I had to get in shape for the Miss America Pageant."

As Brandi prepared for Atlantic City, her support team was being led—with great approbation from her mother—by Paul Brown. "Paul is my closest friend," Brandi said. "He got the gym where he goes to let me work out there. He found a voice teacher for me and an acting coach. I paid them with my scholarship money. I decided not to go back to N.Y.U. this year, so I had to give up the student housing. Paul let me stay at his apartment in Chelsea," she said. "And I had to have a platform, which Paul and I decided should be Colin Powell's America's Promise, with its five fundamentals: mentoring, protecting, nurturing, preparing, and serving. I'm trying to read Colin Powell's book. He tells you how important mentoring is to influence a young person's life."

Jamye Shaw, a friend of Paul's, in Elizabethtown, North Carolina, made all of Brandi's pageant costumes. The cost was covered by the state-pageant scholarship. The clothes included:

For the Parade of States—a black velour catsuit with a pinwheel overskirt in turquoise, fuchsia, and yellow panels outlined in black velour.

Evening Wear Competition—a black knit gown with long sleeves, a trumpet-shaped bottom, and crystals at the hem, collar, and cuffs.

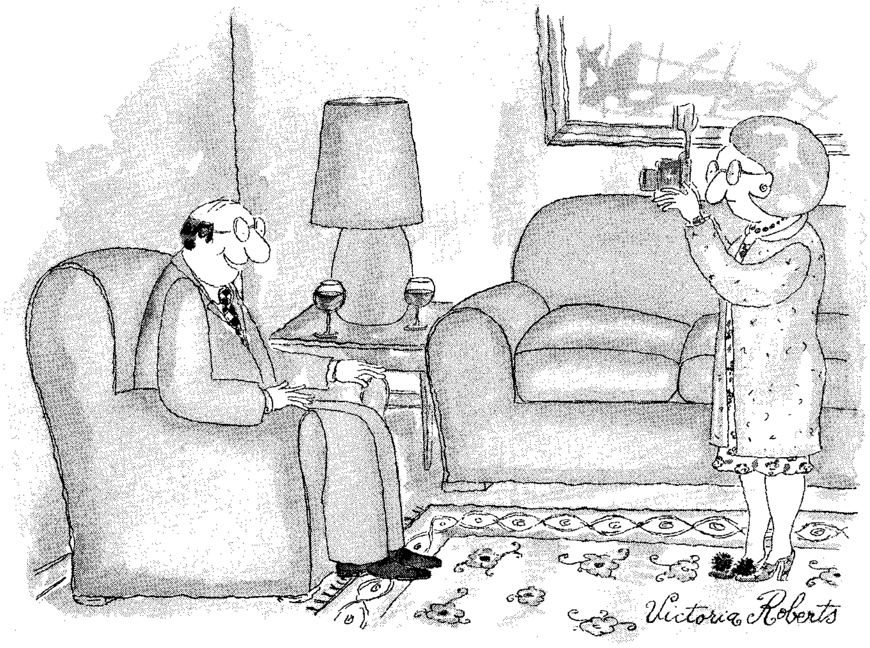
Interview Competition—a watermelon-red knit suit with long sleeves and a Queen Anne neckline.

Boardwalk Parade—a red fitted gown trimmed with red fur. One shoe had a battery-operated flashing Big Apple that was expected to upstage Miss Wisconsin's cow's-head slippers, with a cheese on top of one cow's head.

With her wardrobe, talent, platform, interview practice, and support team in place, Brandi set out on the itinerary programmed by the Miss America Organization. On September 6, 1999, she arrived in Atlantic City and, with the fifty other contestants, walked single file through an archway of oars held by ten lifeguards. Then she went to Harrah's hotel to stay—with her assigned "travelling companion," Kathy Weyand, in an adjoining room—until the grand finale, two weeks later. In her room, Brandi found a "Good Luck" message from BeBe Shopp.

Later that day, Brandi stepped onto the stage of Boardwalk Convention Hall for the first time. "It's overwhelming," she said. "It's incredibly huge. It gives me the chills to think about it."

Convention Hall, which seats twelve thousand people, is across the Boardwalk from a plaza where the Volcano Coaster and the Heigh Ho! Dwarfs attraction were set up. The hall, built in 1929, may well be the ugliest edifice in the wasteland of Atlantic City, where garish hotels seem to accentuate the pervasive atmosphere of economic and moral depression. Neither Brandi nor any of the other contestants appeared to notice their surroundings, where practically every other neon-lit storefront seemed to advertise either "Adult Movies" or "Cash for Gold."



"Just finishing the roll?"

As the fifty-one Misses embarked on their scheduled program, they met Robert L. Beck, the president and C.E.O. of the Miss America Organization. Beck answered questions about a proposed change in eligibility rules which would have opened the pageant to young women with divorce or abortion in their histories. State-pageant people objected vehemently to the change and filed court complaints. (A week after the pageant, Beck was fired.) Yolande Betbeze Fox, Miss America 1951, issued an irate statement: "This opens a door that is dark and unfortunate. This wonderful apple-pie, American tradition—I don't think it needs to be changed." BeBe Shopp said, "No way. That's opening Pandora's box." The girls buzzed among themselves over the idea of the proposal. Brandi said she was adamantly opposed to abortion. "In every way, shape, and form, I'm pro-life," she said.

Donny and Marie Osmond, the hosts of the live TV broadcast of the pageant, appeared at rehearsals and labored to display cheerful wholesomeness. A pageant official told the Misses that having Donny and Marie as hosts represented "a break in tradition." One said, "They bring a comfort level and classiness to our TV show. They really care. They really want to be here."

When they weren't rehearsing, some of the contestants made good-will appearances around town. Four Misses visited a church soup kitchen, where they served doughnuts and a hot meal to a group of dazed-looking homeless men and, under the direction of a motherly black woman named Sister Jean, urged everyone to "stomp on Satan" as their feet banged the floor to a gospel song.

The contestants were instructed to follow a set of inflexible rules while they were in Atlantic City: they were not to "participate in any interview, photo, or any type of publicity unless approved by the Hostess Committee's Pageant Press Center . . . attend parties, meetings, conventions, social events or make any public appearances . . . smoke in public . . . imbibe alcoholic beverages . . . be in the company of or speak to a Judge . . . wear her state crown while in Atlantic City." Brandi followed the rules without comment.

It was after Brandi had her interview with the judges that she seemed to be disengaging herself somewhat from the pageant. "I started wondering what it all meant, why they were asking the questions they asked, why I was giving the answers I gave," she said. "They knew I was raised by a single mother, and they were pressing me, I thought, to get me to feel sorry for myself. Afterward, I wanted to go back and say to them, 'If you want a victim, look elsewhere.' I was very angry, but I kept smiling. I'm a hide-behind-my-smile person."

During the preliminary competitions—swimsuit, talent, evening wear, and interview—Brandi didn't win any awards. Paul Brown turned up on a visitors' night and assured her that winning preliminaries was no indication of who would win the crown. Brandi's boyfriend, Randy, a clean-cut fellow who shared her religious faith, visited, too. He was very deferential. He told Brandi how impressed he was by what he had seen.

"These girls are really working hard," he said solemnly to me. "This is a big deal, especially with those scholarships."

BeBe Shopp moved easily among the girls, offering bits of wisdom, such as "Classy ladies do not bump or grind." She seemed to be having the time of her life, advising the contestants: "Always have that smile on your face." I had heard the same comment from BeBe earlier—half a century earlier, actually—in Atlantic City, on her last night as Miss America, when she tearfully—as I reported then in these pages—crowned the new Miss America, for 1949. That year's Miss New York State, a nurse named Wanda Nalepa, from the Bronx, meekly offered the judges her only talent: nursing. She said, "All I know how to do is give a good back rub." She wasn't a winner, either, but she said that she wasn't going back to nursing. She had met a man who talked to her about becoming a model. "You get more when you're a model," she told me.

Months after the pageant, Brandi gave me a quick rundown of what she had noticed about the other contestants. She remembered most of them. "Miss California, whose platform was Breast-Cancer Education and Awareness, was very flirty and tap-danced on top of big drums. Miss Georgia didn't say much. She had Character Education. Miss Kansas was for Depression Awareness, and she sang 'I Dreamed a Dream.' Miss Kentucky, who won, was a belter; she sang 'As If We Never Said Goodbye.' It took her four tries to become Miss Kentucky, and she changed her platform a number of times, finally abandoning Volunteerism and Eating-Disorders Awareness for Homeless Veterans Outreach.

"Miss Maine, a cancan dancer, had Student Service Learning. Miss Maryland danced a ballet on point to 'Stars and Stripes Forever.' She had Domestic Violence. Miss Mississippi had Literacy and sang 'Trouble.' I liked Miss Mississippi," Brandi said. "Miss Nevada had Eating-Disorder Shared Awareness. She's a Rockette. At first, I thought she was an airhead, but I liked her. One of my favorites was Miss New Jersey, the Princeton junior who sang, in Italian, an aria from 'The Marriage of Figaro,' wearing an eighteenth-century boy's costume. We plan to go Christmas shopping together in New York," Brandi said. "Miss New Mexico, another favorite of mine, was in my Bible study and had Literacy Awareness. She sang 'Hurt Me.' Miss Rhode Island sang 'I'm a Woman' and had Prevention of Teen Pregnancy and Diseases. Miss South Carolina was warm and bubbly and had Volunteerism, and we both agreed on Jesus as our Saviour. Miss Wyoming, a ballet dancer, had Sexual Abstinence Until Marriage as her platform. She danced to 'Somewhere Out There.' "

On September 19th, the day after the pageant—as Miss America 2000, Heather French, was being photographed stepping into Atlantic City's ocean surf, according to the annual ritual—Brandi returned home with her mother to Pasadena, Maryland.

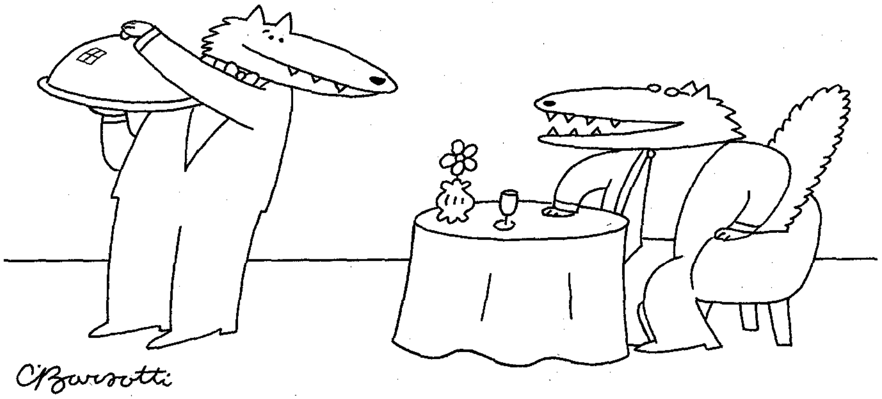
"All I wanted to do was sleep," she told me, a few weeks later, when she was back in New York. "But I went to church with Randy, and we talked. I felt bad for my mom and for Paul. My mom took what happened to me very hard. But I didn't cry. It wasn't the end of my life. And my grandmother is still wearing my Miss America T-shirt whenever she goes to the mall.

"Looking back on it, no matter how hard you try, you lose your sense of yourself," she said. "You put a spin on yourself. There's the pageant person and the real person. All these people think I'm Barbie, because I let them fix me up and put clothes on me. But now I'm feeling more like me."

Brandi's duties as Miss New York State continued until July. She went in her official capacity to an open house at the Y.M.C.A. in Rome, New York (fee, a hundred dollars). She appeared at the New York Auto Salon & Auction (fee, eight hundred dollars). She took up her voice and acting lessons again, with teachers selected by Paul Brown. It was too late to register for the fall term at N.Y.U., so she moved in with Paul for three months. One weekend, Randy came to visit her. They talked about getting married, probably in two years or so.

On April 1st, Brandi accompanied Paul Brown to the first annual Miss 5 Boroughs Pageant. It was held at the Theatre of the Riverside Church, whose scruffy stage had been decorated with two plastic palm trees and a couple of striped beach umbrellas. The audience was mostly black or Hispanic, and seemed to be made up mainly of the tired and anxious relatives of the participants. Brandi floated in among them, a symbol of their hopes, wearing her crown and a red crêpe cocktail dress. Contestants' relatives, holding bundles of evening gowns and swimsuits for their girls, stopped Brandi here and there to ask a tremulous question or two. Bending her crowned head to them, she gave careful, courteous answers.

The pageant had a title: "Leaders of Tomorrow." It had a subtitle: "An Evening of Culture, Talent & Elegance." After six impeccably barbered United States marines carried American flags onto the stage and led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance and "The Star-Spangled Banner," Brandi



"O.K., I'm ready. You can let it go."

• •

welcomed the contestants. She sang "Ice Cream." The audience was entranced.

The contestants numbered twelve: a monologuist, a ballet dancer, a Middle Eastern dancer, a hip-hop jazz dancer, a pianist, an actress, and six vocalists. After three hours of performances and swimsuits and evening gowns, the audience applauded mightily when Brandi crowned the winner, Katie Horn, an eighteen-year-old Manhattanite, who had sung "Think of Me," from "The Phantom of the Opera." With the crown of Miss 5 Boroughs came a five-hundred-dollar scholarship and the chance to compete in the Miss New York State Pageant. The winner and four runners-up also received round-trip tickets to either Boston or Washington on the Delta Shuttle, one of the pageant's sponsors.

After alternating between living in Paul Brown's apartment and with relatives on Staten Island, Brandi was invited by Kate Shindle, Miss America 1998, to share her apartment on the Upper West Side. As Miss New York State, Brandi had covered for Kate at the opening of the new AMC Theatres on Forty-second Street (no fee). Kate had an understudy job in "Jekyll & Hyde." Shortly after settling in, Brandi, looking calm and untroubled, met me for a quick bite to eat. "This is an incredible point in my life," she said. "I've got an agent! He's sending me out on auditions." With hardly a pause or a change in tone, she added, "And Randy and I have separated. It became clear to me that Randy and I now are in two separate worlds."

She didn't dwell on it. There was too much else to dwell on in her new life in Manhattan. We started talking about the strong reaction of many of the pageant people to the idea of opening up the competition to women with divorce or abortion in their pasts. Brandi now realized that it had taken fifty years for an African-American woman to win a spot as a contestant in the national pageant, and she started thinking about discrimination. She said that she would definitely be against discrimination toward her friend Paul Brown, who is gay. How, then, she wondered, could she condone discriminating against a woman who had been divorced or had had an abortion? Brandi said she felt awful when she thought about it like that. "I was wrong," she told me.

Brandi said she was learning a lot from her new roommate, Kate. The two of them had been getting together on late evenings at Sam's, the oldest theatrical bar in New York, on West Forty-fifth Street. Kate said it was a good hangout for people in show business. It had a grand piano on a little stage, a sophisticated pianist, Ken Lundie, who knew all the show tunes, a microphone, and a good sound system. Singers were welcome to get up and sing whatever they liked. So Brandi and Kate volunteered to sing there quite often. "Kate is a belter," Brandi said. "I do belt, but the fact is I can hit high notes other people can't." She went on, "Kate is very clever. The other day, she said to me, 'I wish I could go two days without hearing from a man who wants to wear my crown.' "

A few days later, over supper, I met Kate, who was alert, engaging, and sure of herself, as well as clever. She is twenty-three. "Without Miss America, it would have taken me fifteen years to learn what I learned," Kate said, as Brandi listened impassively. "As Miss America, I learned how to take things in stride. I learned how to watch my words and to be precise. I learned when to shut up. I learned to count my blessings. I learned that I have to stay healthy and try to enjoy things."

Kate was originally from Moorestown, New Jersey. She was famous for having had the best interview in the history of the pageant. "My platform was AIDS Education," she said. "It was a tremendous advantage to have that platform. As Miss America, I travelled twenty thousand miles a month. I averaged ten speeches a week. I rode in a limo. When my year was up, I was offered a full-time job with a lobbying organization for AIDS prevention. But I decided I would be a more successful advocate in the cause of AIDS prevention if first I became a famous actress."

After her year was up, Kate went to Northwestern University and finished her degree in Theatre. "Then I came to New York," she said. "No limo. I took the subway. I needed a job to keep me off the street. I saw an ad in the paper that a new restaurant, Artie's Delicatessen, was about to open on upper Broadway, right near my apartment. So I went to Artie's, and they hired me as a waitress. The tips were good. The media stories were even better. I was written about all over the world as the Miss America who was working in a deli. I did it only for a couple of months, but it got me more publicity than I could ever dream of. Now I can go to Artie's and eat free, too." For her understudy job as Lucy, the doomed prostitute in "Jekyll & Hyde," Kate was earning the Equity minimum of about twelve hundred dollars a week. "I went from deli waitress to whore," she said, with the confidence of a seasoned trouper who knows how to deliver a punch line.

Brandi regarded her friend with quiet admiration. "Are we singing at Sam's this week?" she asked politely.

"This week for sure," Kate said.

I didn't hear from Brandi for a few weeks. Finally, she called and said she had been very busy, visiting her mother and finding out how she stood at N.Y.U. in case she decided to go back. She had auditioned for roles in a few soap operas, including "All My Children." She had auditioned for "Law & Order" (no callback). It wasn't exactly a stunningly positive activity report. But she sounded happy and relaxed. Then she said, speaking more quickly than usual, that she would be away for the next week or so.

"I'm going to a Club Med in the British West Indies with Michael," she said casually. "My whole life is changing. I don't know if it's a test or a blessing. I'll call you when I get back."

About ten days later, she was telling me quite a bit about Michael—Michael Russek. "I've had such an interesting journey," she said. "Michael has changed me completely. He is a take-charge man. When we enter a room, he says where we'll sit and he holds the chair for me. I never had anybody that sincere. Michael is Jewish. I'm in love with him, and he's in love with me. It happened quickly, and it *happened.* He's a jeweler, and he's twenty-nine, dark, with curly hair. The opposite of me," she said with a laugh, and continued, speaking in a rhythm and a tone I had never heard from her before.

"I love going to Hineni. That's Hebrew for 'Here I am,'" she said, and she said it in the way some people—usually people under the age of seven—make an assumption that everybody in the world is familiar with what they are talking about. "Michael and I go to Hineni twice a week at Congregation Kehilath Jeshurun to listen to Esther Jungreis, the rebbetzin," Brandi said. "It's so interesting. The rebbetzin's husband was a rabbi. Eighty-five people—almost everybody in her entire family—were killed in the Holocaust. She's a survivor. She tells about what the Nazis did, and her terrible experiences in the concentration camp. Her *bubbe* and her *zayde*—that means grandmother and grandfather—were gassed and incinerated. The rebbetzin draws huge audiences. She traces her lineage back to David. She's so warm, so sympathetic, and so kind to me. I've been thinking about becoming Jewish."

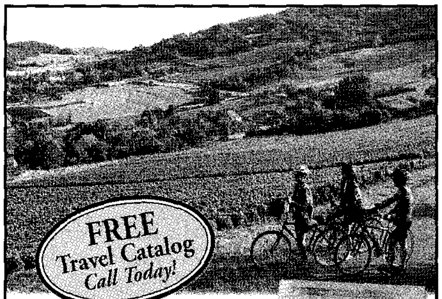
I hadn't expected that much of an alteration, and I might have looked somewhat taken aback. But Brandi smiled and, uncharacteristically, gave me a quick pat on the arm. She went on, "Michael has exposed me to people I didn't believe existed, people who are grounded and successful and have their priorities straight. Paul Brown met Michael and likes the way Michael is very supportive of me and of everything I want to do. Michael wants me to keep in shape. We go to his gym nearly every morning at six for an hour and a half. After the gym, we go home and have some fruit."

Brandi patted my arm again. "Michael and I are always talking," she said. "We sometimes stay up talking until 3 A.M. Every day at two o'clock, wherever we are, one of us calls the other, and we talk. Every day, he gives me something else to make me different.

"The other night, I was with Michael at his apartment, and Kate called me and said she had forgotten her key and would I bring it to her at the theatre. And Michael said, 'Ask her to come and pick it up.' Before Michael, I wouldn't have thought to do that. Now I'm starting to learn to put a value on my time. I'm a humble person. But Michael tells me I disrespect myself if I'm too humble. He believes in me. I want to play Laurey in the revival of 'Oklahoma!' I *know* I'm going to be Laurey," she said. "Also, at Club Med, Michael and I wrote a love song together, and he's going to work with me on it and everything else I do. You've got to meet Michael."

I met Michael very soon, over supper with Brandi. "I knew I was going to marry this girl the moment I saw her," he said, holding Brandi's hand with both of his. He was just as Brandi had described him—dark and handsome and personable. He exuded energy and warmth and entrepreneurialism. It wasn't long before he had me trotting along after Brandi and him to the synagogue for Hineni.

When we arrived, the sanctuary was packed: about two hundred and fifty people, of all ages, had paid the requested donation of five dollars. The rebbetzin was a petite, bouncy woman in her sixties, with a Hungarian accent and blond, coiffed hair, and she wore high heels, a chic beige suit, and substantial jewelry. She became very animated at the sight of Brandi and Michael, holding hands. Her style, onstage, was a cross between Dr. Ruth and Gracie Allen. She quoted a verse from the Book of Exodus and gave a moving account of her visit, after the end of the Second World War, to a little Hungarian town where, as a small child, she used to stay with her



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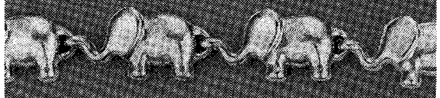

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beloved *bubbe* and *zayde*. Listening carefully to the tale, Brandi cried. Then Michael gave me a ride home in his BMW, taking the opportunity to play a tape of himself, at the age of twelve, singing a liturgical song in Hebrew.

On June 15th, Brandi made her final public appearance as Miss New York State. It was at a music class at Stuyvesant High School, in Manhattan. She brought her crown, which she carried in a handsome wooden box, and showed it to the students. They asked her questions like "Do you have a boyfriend?" and "Did you get along with the other girls in the Miss America Pageant?" To those questions, Brandi answered yes. Nobody asked her about her platform, and she didn't say much about Colin Powell or America's Promise.

Her agent sent her to what she thought would be a "private audition"—for the role of Laurey in "Oklahoma!"—with the producer Cameron Mackintosh. It turned out to be an audition for more than two hundred girls over the course of a few days. The next week, Brandi had an audition for the show with some casting people. A few days later, her agent told her that the casting people liked her but that she was too "refined" to play Laurey. They thought she seemed promising, though, as a replacement for the part of Christine in "The Phantom of the Opera," which their company also produced. So Brandi auditioned for Christine (no callback). Her agent then told her that the plan to revive "Oklahoma!" had been dropped.

"Michael is taking over, basically, in what we'll have as our own production company," Brandi next reported to me over the telephone. "Michael and I have been studying the book 'All You Need to Know About the Music Business,' by Donald S. Passman, the big entertainment lawyer. Michael is a salesman. He's getting people together to help me make a demo. They'll teach me pop—my own pop style. Tim Hunter, the dancer, who's in 'Aida,' is working with me one-on-one. He was the understudy for Simba, in 'The Lion King.' Michael has a friend, Flipper, who took us to a studio, the Hit Factory, used by Michael Jackson, that costs thousands of dollars a day. Flipper works in A. & R. You'll love him. We met this guy, Vada, who helped produce a record for Lauryn Hill. Vada is arranging for me to sing 'I Will Always Love You' in the studio, just to see what it sounds like. Vada has a friend who lets him use the studio. We're all getting together at Sam's tonight. Come to Sam's. All our people will be there—our trainer, everybody. Kate and I are going to sing."

At Sam's, Michael seated me next to Vada Nobles, a courteous, worried-looking young black man. "Vada is going to be working with us, producing new songs for Brandi," Michael said commandingly. "And here's Flipper. And Will Parker. Will does warmups for Montel Williams."

Kate arrived with her hair cut very short. She had just been cast as Sally Bowles in the touring production of "Cabaret." Everybody waited patiently for Brandi and Kate to take turns singing, accompanied by Ken Lundie at the piano. Of Brandi, they said, "She's got a glow" and "Her voice is an instrument." Vada spent most of the evening telling me about the lawsuit he'd brought against Lauryn Hill, whose solo album had sold about eight million copies. Vada told me he wanted a third of the money, because he had worked with her, he said, in "what began as a mutually agreed upon songwriting and production collaboration."

June 25th was Brandi Burkhardt's twenty-first birthday. That day, she went to Watertown, New York, to begin the week of pageantry that would culminate with her relinquishing the title of Miss New York State. (Miss 5 Boroughs didn't make it past Watertown.) Her mother, her aunt, and her grandmother attended, and they all cried. "The pageant people told me that I would cry, but I didn't," Brandi confided. "I'm different from the way I was last September, when I thought I had to be what they wanted me to be. Now it's about what *I* want to be. I'm trying not to make any enemies. If I'm too honest, I get in trouble. I'm learning how to package myself."

The next time I talked to Brandi, she told me that she had moved out of Kate's apartment and into Michael's. They had been very busy meeting with music-industry people. "Michael knows how to create deals," she said. "We're going to get the sound out. We're booking the Hit Factory. Vada is arranging for me to sing in the studio."

It turned out that Vada had to cancel the plan for her to sing in the studio. He said there was just too much he had to deal with in his lawsuit.

I didn't hear from Brandi for a while, and then she called and told me that Michael had taken her to Washington, D.C., to visit his brother and the Holocaust Museum. Michael's brother had introduced Brandi to a rabbi who gave her books to read entitled "To Pray as a Jew" and "The Kosher Kitchen."

"I'm trying to keep my eyes open," she told me. "I want to make myself aware of everything before taking steps to convert. I'm questioning everything my whole life is based on." She told me that she had heard from Kate, who was in Portland, Oregon, with "Cabaret." Kate had said she was getting great reviews but that she missed New York terribly.

A few days later, Brandi told me that Michael thought they needed a vacation, and he was going to take her on a four-week cruise to Israel, among other stops. "Michael says we've been working so hard," she said. "So much is going on. We met with one of Michael's jewelry clients, who manages musical people. One songwriter flew in from L.A. to meet with us. Michael and I are working with writers on two new songs called 'My Little Star' and 'Forever in Your Eyes.' And Vada is getting Ron Lawrence—he's called 'the hit man,' because he's the one who helps make hits. We're establishing ground rules. Everybody gets a fair share. It's all done on a handshake."

Brandi's vocabulary seemed to be developing a certain entrepreneurial overtone, a kind of jargony, disjointed jabber that conveyed a sense of something I supposed was the music business.

"Has anything actually happened?" I asked.

"Not production-wise, but relationship-wise," she said.

Brandi called before leaving on her cruise. "Everything will have to wait until we get back," she said. "But we'll be working on the ship. We're taking a CD player, a mini tape recorder, and a CD with songs on it from Flipper. We're taking our copy of 'All You Need to Know About the Music Business.' The ship has a computer room, and we'll be reading torah-dot-org every day on the Internet."

The name of their cruise line was, fittingly, Renaissance. ♦

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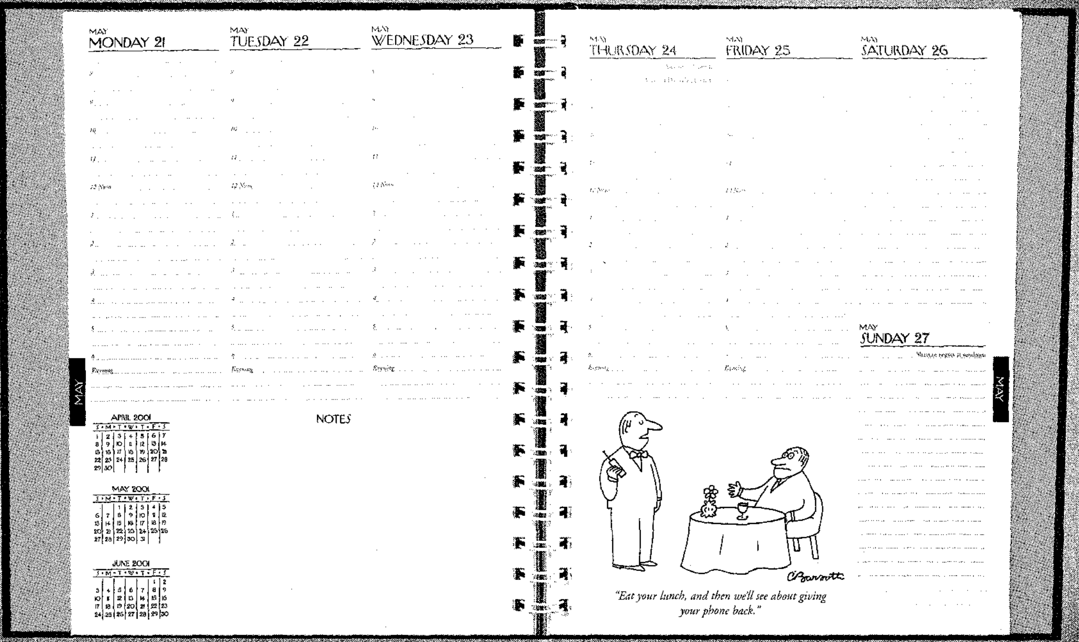
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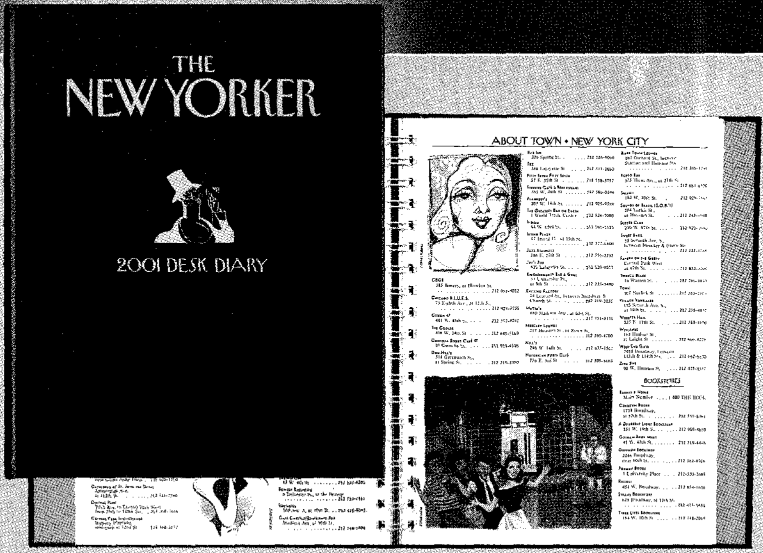
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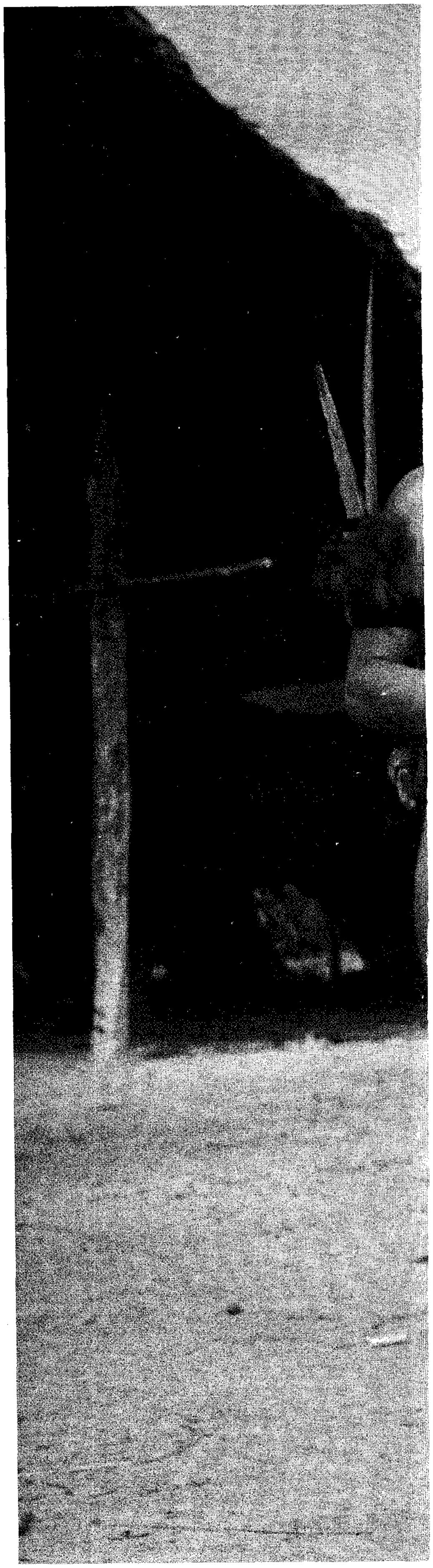
A REPORTER AT LARGE

THE FIERCE ANTHROPOLOGIST

Did Napoleon Chagnon's expeditions harm one of the world's most vulnerable tribes?

BY PATRICK TIERNEY

In November, 1964, Napoleon A. Chagnon, a twenty-six-year-old American anthropology graduate student, arrived in a small jungle village in Venezuela, to study one of the most remote tribes on earth—the Yanomami Indians. At the time, the boundaries between Venezuela and Brazil were still uncertain. The upper Orinoco, with its tumultuous rapids and impassable waterfalls, had frustrated conquistadores since the sixteenth century, making its mountain redoubts a perfect blank slate for the dream of El Dorado and other fantasies about the New World. The German naturalist Alexander von Humboldt, who visited the area at the turn of the nineteenth century, wrote, "Above the Great Cataracts of the Orinoco a mythical land begins . . . the soil of fable and fairy vision." The Yanomami themselves were rumored, by other tribes and by the earliest explorers, to be "wild" and dangerous—so dangerous that, in 1920, one of the first Americans to encounter them, the geographer Hamilton Rice, opened



Over three decades, Chagnon made more than

ANTHRO-PHOTO (2)

wenty trips into Yanomami territory. In 1968, he put on tribal feathers (above left); in 1987, he brought a solar-powered computer.

fire with a machine gun, fearing that the Yanomami were cannibals. Four years later, Rice met the Yanomami again and wrote that they "are not the fierce and intractable people that legends ascribe them to be, but for the most part poor, undersized, inoffensive creatures who eke out a miserable existence."

The reality that Chagnon encountered was, in many ways, stranger than anything previously imagined. In "Yanomamö: The Fierce People," which was published in 1968, Chagnon gave both a harrowing account of a prehistoric tribe and a sobering assessment of what life was like for people whom he later referred to as "our contemporary ancestors." "The Fierce People" eventually became one of the most widely read ethnographical books of all time, selling almost a million copies in the United States alone. Buttressed by subsequent films about the Yanomami made by Chagnon and a documentary filmmaker, Timothy Asch, the book became a standard text in anthropology classes worldwide, and it has gone through five revised editions, the last one in 1997.

"The Fierce People" was written with the verve of an adventure story but was grounded in extensive empirical research. The book opens with this description of Chagnon and an American missionary named James Barker, stumbling into a Yanomami village:

> I . . . gasped when I saw a dozen burly, naked, sweaty, hideous men staring at us down the shafts of their drawn arrows! Immense wads of green tobacco were stuck between their lower teeth and lips making them look even more hideous, and strands of dark-green slime dripped or hung from their nostrils. We arrived at the village while the men were blowing a hallucinogenic drug up their noses. . . . I just stood there holding my notebook, helpless and pathetic. . . . What sort of a welcome was this for the person who came here to live with you and learn your way of life, to become friends with you?

By 1968, Chagnon had spent nineteen months with the Yanomami. During this time, as he writes, he "acquired some proficiency in their language and, up to a point, submerged myself in their culture and their way of life." He studied the Yanomami in a broad variety of aspects, from their travel habits to their technology, use of hallucinogens, agriculture, intellectual life, social and political structures, patterns of settlement, division of labor, marriage practices, trading, and feasting. What was most striking about them was, he wrote, "the importance of aggression in their culture." The Yanomami, he concluded, lived in a "state of chronic warfare":

> I had the opportunity to witness a good many incidents that expressed individual vindictiveness on the one hand and collective bellicosity on the other. These ranged in seriousness from the ordinary incidents of wife beating and chest pounding to dueling and organized raiding by parties that set out with the intention of ambushing and killing men from enemy villages.

Between 1968 and 1972, Chagnon made five more expeditions into Yanomami country, exploring increasingly remote villages. In a 1974 book, "Studying the Yanomamö," and in subsequent editions of his first book, he describes surviving a murder attempt by his hosts—whom he frightens off with a flashlight—and a close encounter with a jaguar, which sniffs him in his hammock. Despite repeated death threats, he pushes on into uncharted territory, where he discovers an isolated group, whose members he calls "the Fiercer People." Abandoned by a Yanomami guide, he hollows out a log canoe and returns downriver.

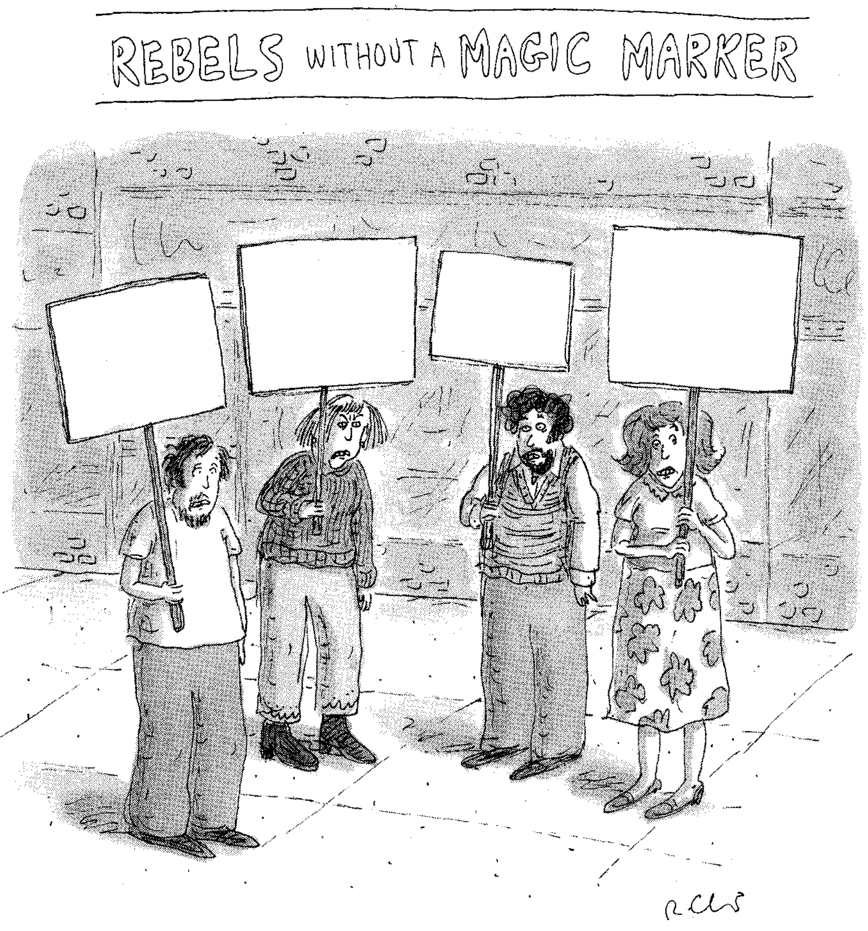
Since the turn of the twentieth century, anthropologists had been inspired to venture farther and farther afield in search of "pure" people, uncontaminated by the Industrial Revolution. In the nineteen-twenties, Margaret Mead went to the South Pacific and wrote her best-seller "Coming of Age in Samoa." Mead described native life in idyllic terms that spoke to the war-weary mood of the time, while overlooking some of the less pleasant aspects of Samoan life, such as the high incidence of violent rape.

"The Fierce People" was the product of a different period. Chagnon, who was born in 1938, had spent an austere childhood in small-town, rural Michigan; his father was an undertaker, and he was the second of twelve children. He earned his doctorate in anthropology at the University of Michigan, and obtained a grant from the National Institute of Mental Health to study the Yanomami. "The Fierce People" was published at the height of the Vietnam War, when violence was the subject of national debate, and it became, in effect, the ethnographic text for the sixties. In 1997, Chagnon told an interviewer for the Los Angeles *Times* that he had written about the Yanomami in reaction to the "garbage" he had learned in graduate school about "noble savages."

When Chagnon first encountered the Yanomami, they were thought to be the largest unacculturated aboriginal group on earth. They slept on bark hammocks slung around the periphery of communal roundhouses with open centers, called *shabonos*. They practiced ritual combats—a graded series of exchanges, starting with chest pounding and escalating into duels with long poles. For gardening, they relied on cutting tools that had been obtained through circuitous trade links with the outside world. Their staple food, which constituted seventy per cent of their diet, was plantains, an import to the New World. Even their genetic makeup was unusual. The Yanomami lack the so-called Diego Factor, an antigen found in other Mongoloid peoples, including Amerindians. Some scientists have hypothesized that they are descended from the first people to cross the Bering Strait, twenty thousand years ago.

The Yanomami had developed a complex belief system about their origins, their afterlife, and their vulnerability to an underworld of demons who were out to destroy souls by spreading disease. (Like many tribal societies, the Yanomami believed that their souls were also threatened by the taking of photographs.) Each village had shamans who maintained constant vigil against the forces of evil by casting spells on perceived enemies.

Today, there are an estimated twenty-seven thousand Yanomami living in hundreds of villages, spread out over about seventy thousand square miles in southern Venezuela and northern Brazil. They speak four distinct dialects, and there are enormous regional variations in trade, warfare, and degrees of contact with the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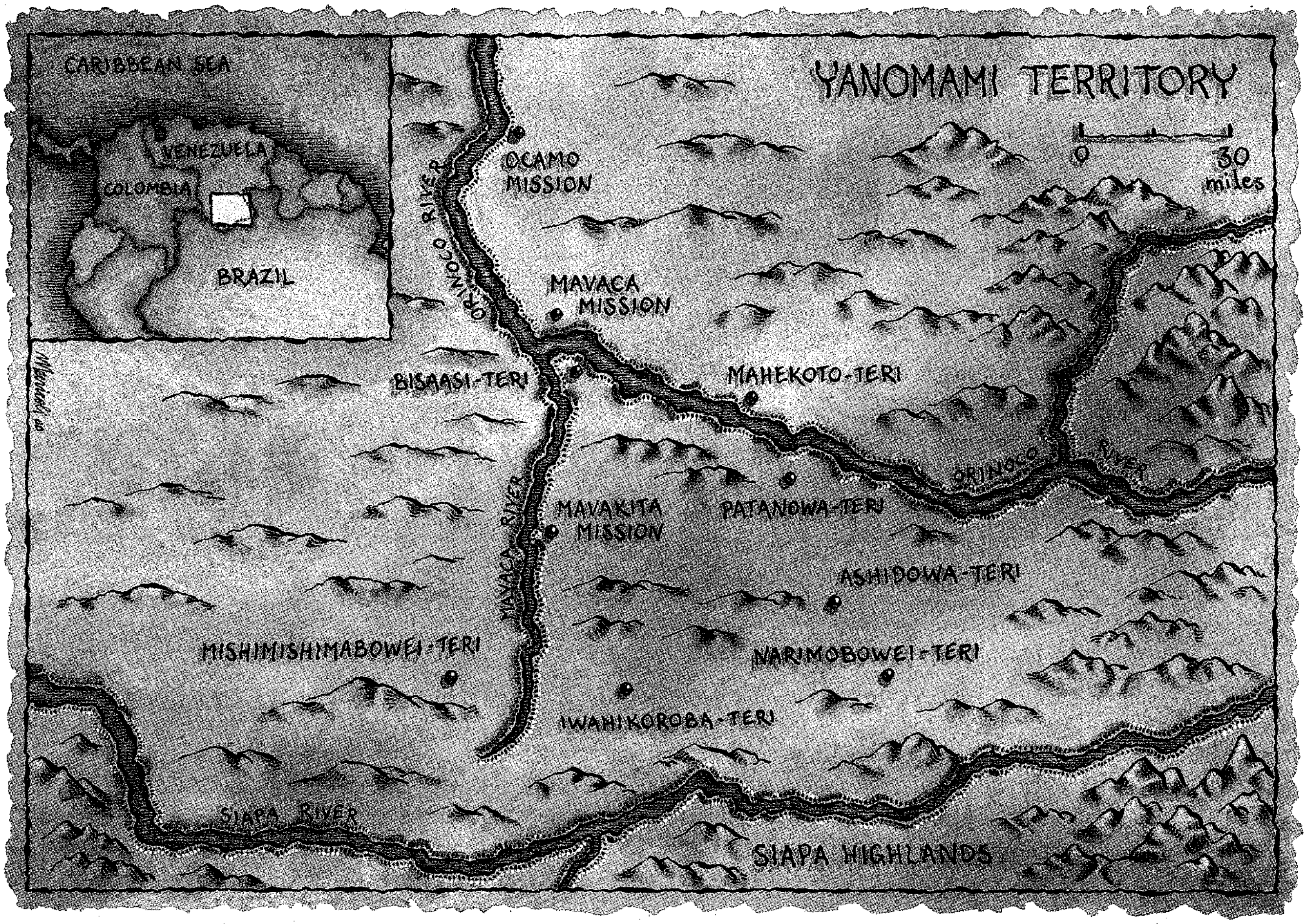
outside world. At the time of Chagnon's first expedition, most of the Yanomami were mountain dwellers. They did not have much in the way of metal tools or personal possessions. They practiced slash-and-burn agriculture, and they spent much of their time on long treks of hunting and gathering. They did not use canoes—there are no navigable rivers in the mountains—and they had little use for clothes, other than a cotton waistband for women and a penis string for men. Increasingly, however, the Yanomami were leaving the mountains to settle along the main course of the Orinoco. There, during the nineteen-fifties, missionaries had established outposts, and Venezuelan government workers had set up centers for treatment of malaria, which had become endemic along the river. Some of the Yanomami in the lowlands were beginning to wear Western clothes, and they had settled into a relatively sedentary life style, which they supported by growing crops, begging, and performing services for outsiders. It was among these Yanomami that Chagnon established his headquarters, at the confluence of the Orinoco and Mavaca rivers, next door to the Mavaca mission in the village of Bisaasi-teri.

Chagnon arrived in Yanomami territory in an aluminum rowboat with an outboard motor. He was carrying axes and machetes to give to the villagers as payment for their coöperation. Although the people of Bisaasi-teri were accustomed to receiving a trickle of trade goods in return for their work in the mission, the sudden windfall created a sensation. In a letter from the field, Chagnon writes that the first recipients of his gifts, all of whom were male, immediately left the village for remote settlements, where the axes and machetes could be used for trade. One of the most startling conclusions of "The Fierce People" is that Yanomami warfare was caused largely by competition among marriageable men over females, who—thanks to the widespread practice of female infanticide—were in scarce supply. In another letter from the field, Chagnon noted, "This particular war got started the day I arrived in the field (cause: woman stealing), and it is getting hotter and hotter." The Yanomami's need to wage war, he observed, encouraged the breeding of males—and this, in turn, led to more war. Among anthropologists, this conclusion contradicted the conventional wisdom that primitive warfare was the result of competition for hunting territories, cropland, or trade routes. Chagnon later said that his findings had come as a surprise to him, too. In 1988, he told a reporter for *U.S. News & World Report*, "I went down there looking for shortages of resources. But it turns out they are fighting like hell over women."

Over a period of thirty years, Chagnon led some twenty expeditions into Yanomami territory and collected an unparalleled body of data, which he presented in two books and more than thirty articles. Perhaps Chagnon's most enduring achievement was explaining the Yanomami's seemingly savage behavior in a way that shed new light on natural selection. In 1988, he published an article in *Science* entitled "Life Histories, Blood Revenge, and Warfare in a Tribal Population," in which he reported that the Yanomami men who murdered had twice as many wives and three times as many offspring as non-murderers had. He concluded that, among the Yanomami, the act of killing bestowed status.

This paper had considerable impact beyond the field of anthropology. Edward O. Wilson and other sociobiologists accepted it as important evidence of the genetic origins of human violence. In a preface to Chagnon's 1992 book, "Yanomamö: The Last Days of Eden," which is "The Fierce People" adapted for a general audience, Wilson lauded Chagnon's synthesis of evolutionary biology and culture as a "master work."

Like most undergraduate anthropology students in the nineteen-seventies, I admired "The Fierce People" for its vivid research and unsentimental approach. In part inspired by Chagnon's example, I set out, in 1983, to do a study of ritual murder in the Andes. Like Chagnon, I concluded that, among some tribes, committing ritual murder was a prestigious act. In 1989, I decided to study the Yanomami, first in Brazil, where the Amazon gold rush had brought epidemics, guns, alcohol, and prostitution, and then in Venezuela, along the Orinoco and in the mountains. Over the next ten years, I made six trips to the Amazon-Orinoco region, spending fifteen months in the field and visiting thirty of the villages that Chagnon had studied. What I found was sharply at odds with what Chagnon described.



When Chagnon arrived, the Yanomami had begun leaving the mountains to settle near the missions along the Orinoco.

In "The Fierce People," Chagnon wrote that the Yanomami were "one of the best nourished populations thus far described in the anthropological/biomedical literature." Unlike Chagnon's "burly" men, the villagers I encountered were—as Rice had observed in 1924—tiny and scrawny, smaller than most African Pygmies. According to data compiled by Darna L. Dufour, a biological anthropologist at the University of Colorado, the adult males average four feet nine inches in height, and the women four feet seven inches. The children have some of the lowest weight-for-height ratios among Amazonian Indians. Moreover, Chagnon's account of Yanomami warfare seemed greatly exaggerated. I visited a village on the Mucajai River, in Brazil, where Chagnon had spent some time in 1967, and where he claimed to have found a group that demonstrated the most extreme form of Yanomami "treachery." However, according to the authoritative sociologist John Peters, who lived there from 1958 to 1967, the group had participated in only four raids in half a century. These raids, he said, had been provoked not by competition for women, as Chagnon had written, but by the spread of new diseases, which prompted angry accusations of witchcraft.

Others, too, were bewildered by some of Chagnon's writings. The linguist Jacques Lizot, who had been encouraged by Claude Lévi-Strauss at the Collège de France, has lived for twenty-five years with the Yanomami. In 1994, Lizot criticized Chagnon in the *American Ethnologist* for obscuring the identity of twelve villages in his homicide study, making it difficult for other anthropologists to verify his data. The German ethnologist Irenäus Eibl-Eibesfeldt, a former head of the human-ethnology department at the Max Planck Institute, outside Munich, has been conducting research among the Yanomami since 1969. In 1994, he and another Yanomami researcher at the institute wrote a letter to the American Human Behavior and Evolution Society, which claimed that Chagnon had got important mortality-rate statistics wrong.

In the past decade, some of Chagnon's colleagues, as well as Catholic missionaries in the field, have expressed concern about the impact of his research on Yanomami culture. Kenneth Good, who worked with Chagnon while researching his Ph.D., has lived among the Yanomami for twelve years—longer than any other American anthropologist. Good calls Chagnon "a hit-and-run anthropologist who comes into villages with armloads of machetes to purchase coöperation for his research. Unfortunately, he creates conflict and division wherever he goes." During his years among the Yanomami, Good witnessed a single war, and the only time he felt endangered was on his first, nervous night in the field, in 1975, when Chagnon and another anthropologist, both drunk, burst into

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his hut, tore his mosquito netting, and pushed him out of his hammock in a mock raid.

In 1995, Brian Ferguson, an anthropologist at Rutgers University, published a book entitled "Yanomami Warfare: A Political History," which challenged the sociobiological theories drawn from "The Fierce People" and other studies by Chagnon. Ferguson, whose book analyzes hundreds of sources, wrote that most of the Yanomami wars on record were caused by outside disturbances, particularly by the introduction of steel goods and new diseases. Ferguson noted that axes and machetes became highly coveted among the Yanomami as agricultural tools and as commodities for trade. In his account, evangelical missionaries, who arrived in Yanomami territory during the fifties, inadvertently plunged the region into war when they disbursed axes and machetes to win converts. In time, some of the missions became centers of stability and sources of much needed medicine. But Chagnon, whose study of Yanomami mortality rates took him from village to village, dispensed steel goods in order to persuade the people to give him the names of their dead relatives—a violation of tribal taboos.

In a chapter entitled "The Yanomamo and the Anthropologist," Ferguson described how these methods destabilized the region—in effect, promoted the sort of warfare that Chagnon attributed to the Yanomami's ferocity. By Chagnon's own account, he shuttled between enemy villages and cultivated "informants who might be considered 'aberrant' or 'abnormal' outcasts in their own society," and who would give him tribal secrets in exchange for beads, cloth, fishhooks, and, above all, steel goods. To get the data he wanted, Chagnon, by his own account, began " 'bribing' children when their elders were not around, or capitalizing on animosities between individuals." Ferguson writes that Chagnon stirred up village rivalries by behaving like a regional big man and an "un-Yanomami . . . wild card on the political scene."

This depiction of Chagnon was supported by many of the Yanomami with whom I spoke. In 1996, in the village of Momaribowei-teri, a man named Pablo Mejía told me that when he was twelve he had witnessed Chagnon's arrival in his village: "He had his bird feathers adorning his arms. He had red-dye paint all over his body. He wore a loincloth like the Yanomami. He sang with the chant of his shamanism and took *yopo*"—a powerful hallucinogen used by Yanomami shamans to make contact with spirits. "He took a lot of *yopo*. I was terrified of him. He always fired off his pistol when he entered the village, to prove that he was fiercer than the Yanomami. Everybody was afraid of him because nobody had seen a *nabah*"—white man—"acting as a shaman. He said to my brother Samuel, who was the headman, 'What is your mother's name?' My brother answered, 'We Yanomami do not speak our names.' Shaki"—the Yanomami's name for Chagnon—"said, 'It doesn't matter. If you tell me, I'll pay you.' So, although they didn't want to, the people sold their names. Everyone cried, but they spoke them. It was very sad."

Ferguson described an incident, in 1972, when Chagnon arrived in the village of Mishimishimabowei-teri, approximately seventy miles upriver from Bisaasi-teri. In exchange for blood samples, which he was collecting for his genealogical study, Chagnon distributed machetes to a nearby rival village, whereupon the headman of Mishimishimabowei-teri, an aggressive man named Moawa, threatened, Chagnon wrote, to "bury an ax" in his head if he didn't give his last machete to a man Moawa designated. Chagnon complied, but when he was safely back at his home base, in Bisaasi-teri, he vented his feelings in a way that shows how deeply he had become enmeshed in local politics. In "Studying the Yanomamö," Chagnon writes, "I told the Bisaasi-teri that I planned never to return to Moawa's village. . . . I was tired of having people threaten to kill me. I was alarmed at how close some of them had come. I told them that I would do 'the same' to Moawa as he did to me, should he ever venture to come to Mavaca [mission] to visit."

In a review of Ferguson's book in *American Anthropologist,* Chagnon blamed the missionaries for any destabilization, pointing out that the conflicts had broken out long before 1964, when he arrived. In the 1997 edition of "The Fierce People," he wrote that he had been something of a savior to the people of Mishimishimabowei-teri, helping to broker "neolithic peace" between them and the antagonistic people of Bisaasi-teri. He said that, in return, the Mishimishimabowei-teri had bestowed on him the name of their village—an honor usually reserved for chiefs. "I was their village," Chagnon writes. "Their village was me."

Chagnon, who retired this year as a professor of anthropology at the University of California in Santa Barbara, still retains his eminence in the field. Irven DeVore, a professor of biological anthropology at Harvard, says, "Chag was both first and thorough. First in the sense that very, very few anthropological studies have been carried out by an anthropologist who was first on the scene. Thorough in the sense that Chag has visited at least seventy-five Yanomami villages on both sides of the Venezuela and Brazil borders. I cannot think of a comparably thorough survey among any cultural group by any anthropologist. Chag gathered very detailed and documented data on the villages—so much so that another investigator could study the same population and come to a different conclusion. Chagnon's study was 'scientific' in the best sense of the word."

In 1995, Chagnon agreed to meet with me in his office in Santa Barbara. By this time, I had become a human-rights activist on behalf of the Yanomami and other Amazon tribes. I had written a piece in the New York *Times* that was critical of one of Chagnon's Venezuelan friends and colleagues, Charles Brewer-Carías, and Chagnon was angry about it. In recent years, he had become such a controversial figure for his research among the Yanomami that the Venezuelan government had prohibited him from reëntering Yanomami country. Chagnon refused to answer any of my substantive questions about his troubles, saying that, at some later date, he planned to write about them himself. During the preparation of this article, he was again asked to answer questions about his work with the Yanomami. After first agreeing to talk in depth to *The New Yorker*, he changed his mind a few days later and declined to comment.

One of Chagnon's most important academic mentors was the celebrated geneticist Dr. James Neel, who was a member of Chagnon's Ph.D. advisory committee at the University of

"I'm not ordering any lunch, Caswell—I'm going to eat yours."

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Michigan. Neel, who died earlier this year, first achieved fame in the field of inherited disease and then headed the Atomic Bomb Casualty Commission, which was established after the war to study survivors of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Between 1965 and 1972, he received more than two million dollars from the Atomic Energy Commission to compare the cellular-mutation rates of the Japanese survivors with those of the Yanomami and other "primitive tribes" that had not been exposed to radiation. The immediate goal was to determine the effects of radiation on the genetic material of cells. The ultimate goal was to help set radiation safety standards in the United States.

Chagnon became, as Neel put it, the "indispensable cultural anthropologist" in Michigan's Human Genetics Department. Between 1966 and 1971, Chagnon made six trips to Brazil and Venezuela, as a member of a multidisciplinary team led by Neel to make what Neel described as the most comprehensive study of a tribal people ever attempted.

Neel had long been interested in unadulterated societies. A self-professed eugenicist, he believed that modern democracies, with their free breeding among large populations, violated the process of natural selection and promoted genetic entropy. Tribal people, in his view, were likely to have superior genetic material because they lived according to the survival-of-the-fittest principle—that is, they were ruled by polygamous chiefs who had triumphed over their rivals. He hoped that by studying the Yanomami he might be able to isolate specific genes for male leadership—or, as he put it, an "Index of Innate Ability." This view of the Yanomami as a superior breeding stock was not generally shared by Neel's medical colleagues. Most of them believed that the Yanomami, like other Amerindian tribes, were immune-depressed.

In January, 1968, Neel's team, which included Chagnon, Asch, and a Venezuelan doctor, Marcel Roche, arrived on the upper Orinoco. Chagnon was sent ahead of the others to secure, as he later wrote, "agreements from the Yanomamo to provide endless outstretched brown arms into which many needles would be stuck for the next weeks." Asch described the process in notes for one of his films: "The villagers are studied on a production line: numbers are assigned to them; specimens of their blood, saliva, and stools are collected; impressions of their teeth are made; and they are weighed and measured by the physical anthropologists." Each person was also photographed and paid with what Neel called "a 'cash' transaction based on trade goods."

Neel had learned of an outbreak of measles that had occurred the previous fall among Brazilian Yanomami in villages more than a hundred miles from the Venezuelan missions. For what he later called "an exercise in preventive medicine," Neel's team brought a thousand doses of live measles vaccine into the upper-Orinoco region. Neel was eager to collect data on vaccine responses. At the time, geneticists wanted to study tribal people who had no measles antibodies, in order to determine how their immune responses differed from those in modern societies. In 1966, Francis Black, a geneticist at Yale, had vaccinated a Brazilian tribe, the Tiriyo, with a measles vaccine, in the hope of using the vaccine virus as "a model of natural measles." He found that the Tiriyo's post-vaccination fevers were extraordinarily high; the temperature elevations were nearly three times those of other races that had been given the same vaccine.

Black had chosen the widely used Schwarz measles vaccine, rather than an older vaccine, the Edmonston B, citing "the risk of severe febrile response" with the Edmonston B vaccine. In 1962, when an immune-compromised child with leukemia died after receiving Edmonston B, one of the vaccine's inventors, John Enders, of Harvard, had cautioned that the strain was dangerous for immune-depressed people. Measles vaccines were also known to produce unusually severe reactions in people suffering from anemia, dysentery, or chronic exposure to malaria—and the Yanomami suffered from all three.

Two years after Black conducted his study, Neel took the Edmonston B vaccine, rather than the Schwarz, into Yanomami territory. None of the other members of Neel's team seem to have participated in this decision, and there is no evidence that any of them would have known the difference between the two vaccines. In January, 1968, Venezuela had begun a national vaccination project, administering the Schwarz vaccine in three diluted doses, on the recommendation of the Centers for Disease Control, in Atlanta. In the United States, where many children still received the Edmonston vaccine—it is no longer used anywhere in the world—it was given with an accompanying dose of gamma globulin, which reduces the fevers by half. Neel had his researchers administer Edmonston B without gamma globulin to forty tribespeople at a mission on the Ocamo River. According to the director of Venezuela's vaccination department, Dr. Adelfa Betancourt, they did so without the department's permission. (A science historian at the University of Pennsylvania, Susan Lindee, was recently quoted in *Time* to the effect that Venezuelan officials gave permission for the vaccinations. She has since told *The New Yorker* that her evidence for the claim was erroneous.)

Over the next three months, the worst epidemic in the Yanomami's history broke out. On the basis of three mission journals, data of the expedition itself, and interviews with Yanomami survivors and with other witnesses, I determined that the course of the epidemic closely tracked the movements of Neel's team. It broke out in the three settlements that received the vaccinations—the Ocamo mission, the Mavaca mission, and a village called Patanowa-teri. Because quarantines were not rigorously imposed, the disease spread to dozens of villages scattered across thousands of square miles. It is estimated that between fifteen and twenty per cent of the Yanomami who contracted measles died in the epidemic.

A child's unmarked grave lies next to a dirt airstrip at the Catholic Ocamo mission. Thirty years ago, a small cross was erected at this spot, but it could not withstand the tropical weather. The remains in the grave are those of a year-old boy named Roberto Baltasar, who died on February 15, 1968; he was the first clearly diagnosed case of measles among the Venezuelan Yanomami recorded in the mission journals. According to Vitalino Baltasar, the boy's father, Roberto had come down with the disease after being vaccinated by Chagnon, under the direction of Neel.

In a 1970 paper entitled "Notes on the Effect of Measles and Measles Vaccine in a Virgin-Soil Population of South American Indians," Neel and Chagnon tell a different story. In their account, a single case of measles coincidentally broke out among the Venezuelan Yanomami as soon as Chagnon and Asch arrived at the Ocamo mission. The measles, Neel and Chagnon wrote, had been brought by a fourteen-year-old Brazilian worker, who had come to Ocamo with other workers. They said that Roche had made "a tentative diagnosis of measles" in the Brazilian teen-ager, and added that Roche's diagnosis was "uncertain," because the boy's symptoms could not be distinguished from "any of a variety of 'jungle fevers.' " (And the boy showed no signs of a measles rash.) Twenty-eight years later, I talked to Roche in Venezuela, in the offices of a scientific journal of which he was the editor. He told me that he did not remember having diagnosed measles in the Brazilian boy. Indeed, according to the Mavaca-mission records, Roche and another doctor reported that the team's arrival had coincided with an ongoing epidemic of bronchopneumonia, whose symptoms match those that Neel and Chagnon described in the fourteen-year-old boy.

Chagnon and Roche began vaccinating the Ocamo Indians with Edmonston B for purely "preventive" reasons, Roche later told me. According to Neel and Chagnon, cases of "moderately severe measles" appeared among the vaccinated Yanomami six days after they were inoculated. The fevers Neel and Chagnon recorded were, on average, far higher than previous responses to the Edmonston B vaccine—so high that they could not be distinguished from the fevers of natural measles. Then Roberto Baltasar died. According to his father, vaccinated Yanomami began fleeing the Ocamo mission, and going into the hills. "They already carried the disease," he told me, twenty-eight years later. "Few of them returned, because the majority died."

It cannot be determined with any accuracy how many died after receiving the vaccination. Chagnon has said that no one who was vaccinated got measles, and, according to the medical consensus at the time, the Edmonston B vaccine virus was not, in itself, contagious. Today, scientists still do not know whether people who have been vaccinated with Edmonston B can transmit measles. What is certain is that the effects of an epidemic, in which hundreds died in a relatively short period, were especially devastating on a people who believed that some new black magic must have brought on the disease and who, at the first sign of the measles rash, panicked and fled from their homes into the forests, away from further medical attention.

A government nurse who was in the area at the time, Juan González, helped the Yanomami collect the bodies of the dead for cremation. "They hung the children in baskets from the trees," he recalls. "The cadavers were placed inside the baskets, all rolled up tightly, like a metallic foil. The women were more loosely wrapped, in leaves, and they were left hanging in hammocks out in the wild among the trees. They tied the men up on poles, higher up in the branches. What a stench there was. Nothing but dead Yanomami. The Yanomami say that they died from that vaccine. That's why even now some of

them don't want to be vaccinated. I don't know how to explain it either, because we initially believed that that first vaccine had come to help us. Instead, it came to destroy us."

Asch, who died in 1994, left about twenty thousand feet of raw footage of the expedition, along with sound tapes, to the Smithsonian Institution. The first mention of the measles outbreak on the soundtrack is heard on the eighteenth of February, three days after Roberto Baltasar's death. On that day, Asch recorded Neel giving him instructions on filming measles victims at the team's base camp, at Mavaca, where a second vaccination center had been established. "Let me tell you what we want to get—extreme severe morbilliform rash," Neel says. "Can you get this? . . . Both eyes. He has the typical morbilliform rash on both cheeks. . . . I'm afraid you're going to [see] some severe cases of measles. . . . We're going to be able to document the whole gamut of measles in this group."

Later, Chagnon asks Neel to summon more doctors, from Caracas, to treat the measles, and Neel agrees. Their radio operator, whom they call Rousseau, says that he will contact people in Caracas and request antibiotics "*por los efectos de la vacuna*"—because of the effects of the vaccine—and adds that the vaccine may bring "*brotes de sarampión*," outbreaks of measles. After listening to Rousseau, Chagnon cautions Neel, "But he's trying to interpret all of them to mean that it's a reaction to the vaccination, which I don't think is a wise thing to do." Chagnon seems bewildered by the extent of the outbreak. He says, "Now we have measles at Mavaca and Ocamo, and I don't know where else it is—I don't know when it arrived."

Later, he tells Neel that the Ocamo Yanomami could easily spread the disease to others by journeying to nearby villages to trade. (Apparently, this happened. A group of Ocamo Yanomami who had sold blood to Neel's researchers for knives, machetes, and other trade goods travelled upriver to visit a village called Shubariwa-teri, which was then devastated by measles.) Chagnon suggests that Neel take quarantine precautions at Mavaca, and he urges that doctors be flown in from Caracas to care for the Ocamo Yanomami. Neel agrees. He then orders his younger colleagues to move farther up the Orinoco, into the tribe's heartland.

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SIPRESS

"Top this, smart guy!"

During the epidemic, Neel, Chagnon, and Asch made two award-winning films. One was "Yanomamö: A Multidisciplinary Study," which presents a general overview of Neel's research objectives. The other was "The Feast," which documents the celebration of a military alliance between two formerly hostile villages. "The Feast" is widely considered one of the finest ethnographic films ever made, because of how it depicts the Machiavellian underpinnings of tribal festivities. In Asch's notes, he explained the background to the film: "To conduct raids and to protect itself from attack, a Yanomamö village must ally itself with neighboring villages. The feast is a means by which these intervillage alliances are formed. To prepare for a feast, the village is first cleaned. Gallons of banana soup for the guests are cooked and stored in large troughs. The guests, waiting outside the village, send in an emissary who chants a greeting and brings back food to his people. The guests burst in, dancing and brandishing their weapons, while the hosts recline in their hammocks. Feasting, trading, and games of ritual violence then take place. Sometimes these 'games' escalate into real massacres."

Both "A Multidisciplinary Study" and "The Feast" were filmed in the village of Patanowa-teri. Twenty-eight years later, when I visited there, a tribal elder named Kayopewe told me, through a translator, that before Chagnon and Asch arrived with their equipment the village had fallen into ruins and was largely abandoned. It was reconstructed and reoccupied, he said, only after Chagnon promised that if the villagers moved back in and held a peacemaking feast with their neighbors from a hostile village called Mahekoto-teri he would give every man among them a machete. Kayopewe said that the whole affair had, in effect, been brokered by the filmmakers.

Asch partly confirmed this account in an article published in the film journal *Sightlines*, in 1972. In a description of the making of "The Feast," he said that Chagnon had sent him, three Yanomami, and a young Protestant missionary, Daniel Shaylor, on an eleven-day trek to Patanowa-teri, a "mountain hideout" far from the vaccination centers along the Orinoco. "After finding [the] Patanowa-teri we set up an aircraft radio and reached Napoleon at Mavaca. He convinced the headman to move back into an old garden near the Orinoco River where the genetics expedition could work with them and we could take film." A large shipment of metal pots duly arrived as payment for the villagers' coöperation. In 1995, according to an article in the *Visual Anthropology Review,* Chagnon said, "I did not 'stage' this—it happened naturally. They could not have cared less about our interests in filming and are the kind of people who would not do something this costly and time consuming for two whole communities simply to accommodate the filming interests of outsiders."

Other payments were required—so many that Chagnon radioed for another plane to bring in more trade goods. When Chagnon distributed the goods, he created what seems, on the soundtrack, to be pandemonium. Later, when Chagnon and Asch asked a group of Yanomami to cut some bananas in front of the camera, they suddenly burst into a frenzied dance—"screaming at the top of their lungs, waving branches of leaves in the air," as Asch later wrote in *Sightlines*. Asch filmed the scene, assuming that it was a "garden ritual." When the Yanomami finally stopped, Chagnon asked them, "What was that all about?"

"Isn't that what you just asked us to do?" the headman replied.

The filming of "The Feast" also had unforeseen consequences. When Chagnon invited the Patanowa-teri's former enemies, the Mahekoto-teri, to participate as guests, he created a new alliance. According to Chagnon, it is Yanomami custom for two villages to celebrate such a union by choosing a new enemy, and after feasting together the new allies launched a raid on a third village, killing a woman in the process. One day, when Asch tried to film a doctor who was treating a sick man from the village of Mavaca, Neel interrupted him. "I don't want any of this," he said. "You're here to document the kind of study we're trying to make. Anyone can walk into a village and treat people. This is not what we're here to do."

After Neel's researchers departed, many of the Mahekoto-teri and Patanowa-teri became sick and died. It is not clear what they died of, because they may have been exposed to many different pathogens, including colds, the Edmonston B virus, and malaria. (Shaylor, the expedition's translator, had arrived in Patanowa-teri with malaria, where he became so sick that he had to be evacuated.) In 1996, when I showed the elders of both villages a video of "The Feast," many of the old men wept. Kayopewe said, "We broke out in sores and rash on our faces, and it burned really badly. One of us died at the village [where the filming took place]. We left him there and fled into the jungles. An old man would die. We would tie him up in the trees. And then a young woman would die, and we would leave her in a basket. We kept dying off and dying off." When the men heard a translation of the soundtrack of "A Multidisciplinary Study," in which Neel claimed that the Patanowa-teri had been saved from measles, thanks to the vaccinations, there was a chorus of protest. "*Horemu! Horemu!*" ("Lies, lies.") One man told me, "Shaki stole our spirits, and we have never been the same."

By the mid-seventies, the Yanomami had become the most intensively studied and filmed tribal group in the world. In Paris in 1978, a festival was devoted to films about them. As scientists, news teams, filmmakers, and others competed for footage and new data about the tribe, some of the Yanomami along the Orinoco became part-time film extras and anthropological informants.

At the same time, native-rights advocates began to criticize outsiders—gold miners, journalists, missionaries, scientists—claiming that cultural disruption and epidemics invariably followed their visits into tribal territories. The first group to defend Yanomami rights was formed in Brazil, and a split developed in anthropology between the researchers who wanted simply to observe tribal culture and those who wanted Indians to have land rights and health care. From 1976 until 1985, Chagnon was prohibited from reëntering Yanomami territory. During those years, he and his wife, Carlene, raised two children, and he became a popular lecturer at Northwestern and then at the University of California at Santa Barbara.

In 1985, Chagnon, accompanied by a University of California graduate student, Jesús Cardozo, who was Venezuelan, succeeded in reëntering Yanomami territory. He returned to Mishimishimabowei-teri, where he hoped to finish his long-term study of the relationship between Yanomami homicide and reproductive success. Cardozo, who no longer has cordial relations with Chagnon, went on to help create the Venezuelan Foundation for Anthropological Research, which promotes Yanomami education and land rights. As Cardozo later recalled of the expedition, "We hadn't even got our boat moored to the shore at Mavakita"—a Mishimishimabowei-teri village that had broken off from the main group following various epidemics in the early seventies—"when Yanomami started coming out and shouting, 'Go away! Shaki brings *xawara* [illness].' Within our first twenty-four hours there, three children died—two in the night and another in the morning." Although there was no connection between Chagnon's arrival and the deaths, the events were seen as further evidence of the anthropologist's malefic power. "On our second night, half of the village fled into the forest to get away from us."

After another day of searching for a community where he could continue his genealogical research, Chagnon found a village, Iwahikoroba-teri, that was willing to receive the expedition. "When we arrived at Iwahikoroba-teri, everybody was sick, throwing up and moaning and lying down in their hammocks," Cardozo said. "I remember a little girl, Makiritama. She was vomiting blood. She was defecating blood, too. I remember her husband—she was very young, she was to be his future wife—showed me where she was spit-

"He passed away last week. Can I give him a message?"

ting up and everything. And I went up to Chagnon and said, 'You know these people are really sick. Some of them could die. I think we should go and get medical help.' Chagnon told me that I would never be a scientist. He said, 'No. No. That's not our problem. We didn't come to save the Indians. We came to study them.' "

For the next several weeks, Chagnon collected homicide data, numbering each Yanomami's chest or arm with a Magic Marker, posing the Yanomami for identification photographs, and paying them with trade goods. He summarized his findings in an article in *Science*, which was published in February, 1988. The article was noted in *Scientific American* for providing a new, though grim model for human evolution: "Through violence a Yanomamö male seems to enhance his reproductive success and that of his kin: he becomes 'fitter.' "

But Yanomami specialists generally rejected the study. In a number of anthropological journals, they challenged Chagnon's findings on ethical, statistical, linguistic, and interpretive grounds. And Chagnon's presence in the media—he was mentioned in the Los Angeles *Times*, in February, 1988, as having said that when the Yanomami were not hunting, or searching for honey, they were often killing one another—became provocative. Less than a year after the *Times* article appeared, the Brazilian military chief of staff cited the Yanomami's truculence as a reason for breaking up their lands. A past president of the Brazilian Anthropological Association, Maria Manuela Carneiro da Cunha, wrote a letter to the *Anthropology Newsletter* in which she held Chagnon accountable, in part, for the government's actions against the Yanomami. In an article entitled "The Academic Extermination of the Yanomami," which was published in the Brazilian cultural journal *Humanidades*, two anthropologists, Alcida Ramos and Bruce Albert, wrote, "Few indigenous people . . . have had their image as denigrated as have the Yanomami, who had the misfortune of being studied by a North American anthropologist named Napoleon Chagnon."

Chagnon responded to da Cunha in the *Anthropology Newsletter* by saying that he could not control the press's tendency to sensationalize his findings, and that he should not be held responsible for the failure of Brazilians to defend the rights of indigenous people. In his 1992 revised edition of "Yanomamö," for which he dropped the subtitle "The Fierce People," he drew a distinction between researchers who sought objective facts, like him, and other anthropologists, who were motivated by a sense of political activism and who "hold a romantic, Rousseauian view of primitive culture."

In 1989, Chagnon proposed bringing a BBC film crew to Bisaasi-teri to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of his arrival in the village. By this time, many more Yanomami had left the highlands to live near the missions along the Orinoco and its tributaries, where they could attend schools, get medical care, and eat a more varied diet. The Yanomami at the missions were considerably more robust than those in the hills, and they had learned how to market their own handicrafts through a trade coöperative run by elected representatives. Along the Orinoco and Mavaca rivers, it was no longer easy for researchers to hire Yanomami porters, informants, or film extras. When the Yanomami at Bisaasi-teri learned that Chagnon was returning, they instructed their representative, a former guide of Chagnon's named César Dimanawa, to write a letter asking the anthropologist to keep away, because his films contained so much "fighting and bloodshed." Dimanawa wrote, "We do not want you to make any more films." Again, the Venezuelan government cancelled Chagnon's permit, citing the "turmoil" that his visit would provoke.

Chagnon turned for help to Brewer-Carías, his old friend. A distinguished botanist, Brewer-Carías had been criticized by environmentalists and human-rights activists for allegedly acquiring, under the pretense of doing research in rain forests, land for gold mining—charges that he emphatically denies. Through Brewer-Carías, Chagnon made another powerful ally, Cecilia Matos, the mistress of the Venezuelan President, Carlos Andrés Pérez, and the head of a foundation that had been set up to assist indigenous and peasant families. Chagnon, Brewer-Carías, and Matos devised a plan to create a Yanomami reserve in the Siapa Highlands—an area of thousands of square miles in which the Indians would live in protected isolation. Only scientists would be allowed into the area, to study the Yanomami at a research center run by Chagnon and Brewer-Carías.

Between August, 1990, and September, 1991, Chagnon and Brewer-Carías organized a dozen expeditions by helicopter into the Siapa region for journalists and scientists, in order to build up national and international support for their project. Three of the villages that were visited by Chagnon, Brewer-Carías, and their entourage were badly damaged by the helicopters. In 1991, Chagnon described one of these events in an article for the magazine *Santa Barbara*, entitled "To Save the Fierce People": "A few feet from landing, we aborted when we saw the leaves of their roofs being blown away by the chopper's downblast. We saw people fleeing in terror and men throwing sticks and stones at us as we retreated up and away."

Dr. Carlos Botto, the director of the Amazon Center for the Investigation and Control of Tropical Disease, in Puerto Ayacucho, was in the village of Ashidowa-teri when Chagnon landed in his helicopter and part of the *shabono* collapsed. "When the poles of the roof fell, a number of Yanomami were injured, and we had to treat them," Botto recalls. "We had to rescue people who were buried under the poles and roofing of the *shabono*. It was a serious situation. The shamans and elders began to practice their chanting because of the collapse of the *shabono*. The expedition left a tragic scar."

In September, 1993, Chagnon and Brewer-Carías were named to a Presidential commission, which was given broad powers over the Yanomami's land and political future. The attorney general's office, leaders of the Catholic Church, and native-rights groups opposed the appointments, and three hundred representatives from nineteen Indian tribes rallied in the streets of Puerto Ayacucho, the capital of the state of Amazonas, in an effort to have Chagnon and Brewer-Carías expelled from Yanomami territory. On September 30th, Chagnon was escorted to Caracas by an Army colonel, who confiscated his field notes and advised him to leave the country—which he did.

In the United States, Chagnon remained highly regarded. Earlier that year, he had been elected president of the prestigious Human Behavior and Evolution Society.

In September of 1996, after undergoing a weeklong quarantine, I trekked for seventeen days into the Siapa Highlands with a Brazilian malaria-control worker, Marinho De Souza. We were the first outsiders to revisit the area since Chagnon's tumultuous helicopter descents, and we found the villages very different from his descriptions. In articles and in interviews, Chagnon had said that the Siapa Yanomami were healthy, well fed, and peaceful. Here, in the tribe's unspoiled heartland, steel goods were scarce, and the homicide rate among men was much lower than it was in the lowlands along the Orinoco.

What De Souza and I discovered, however, was a fearful, broken society. At Narimobowei-teri, the first village that Chagnon's helicopter had damaged, men with drawn arrows greeted us, fearing that we were enemy raiders. At night, we listened to the chanting of shamans who were trying to exorcise the demonic flying machine that had descended upon their village, dispensing both wonderful trade goods and, they believed, terrible disease. At another village, Toobatotoi-teri, which Chagnon described as "the last uncontacted group in this region," we came to a clearing where shamans were trying to induce helicopters to land by chanting and dancing. The plan, apparently, was to trick any outsiders into unloading their steel gifts and then to scare them into leaving—quickly, before they could infect the people with colds and fevers. Life in the Siapa Highlands had always been a struggle. The villagers had combatted malnutrition, intestinal parasites, and, more recently, malaria. But what they could not comprehend—and what had shaken their world—was the sudden arrival of visitors who seemed to offer an easier life and, at the same time, sowed so much confusion. For them, Chagnon had come to personify everything that both attracted and repulsed them about our culture. They wanted him, and they didn't want him, and they could not forget him.

After twelve days of trekking, we reached Ashidowa-teri, the village where a number of Yanomami had been injured when Chagnon's helicopter blew away a roof. They were living in what looked like woefully inadequate lean-tos, and they were the most sickly, dispirited Yanomami I had seen in Venezuela. As soon as we entered their clearing, a man grabbed my hand, held it to his feverish forehead, and cried, "*Hariri!*" ("Sickness.") Many of the people had painted their faces black, in mourning, and most of the children looked malnourished.

At night, in the firelight of circled hearths, the Yanomami sang about the mysterious arrival of the helicopters and their strange riders. Then the people around the campfires began mourning for their departed kin. The headman, Mirapewe, said to me, "If you could count the dead, you would see how many of us there were." ♦

"Hey, who wants to hear a great single-malt story?"

FICTION

NELSON AND ANNABELLE

BY JOHN UPDIKE

Nelson Angstrom, the social-worker son of the late Harry (Rabbit) Angstrom, has discovered that he has a half sister, the product of a liaison of his father's forty years ago. He has persuaded his mother and her second husband, Ronnie Harrison, to invite the young woman, an unmarried nurse, to Thanksgiving dinner. The time is the last months of 1999.

Nelson is nervous on behalf of his mother and sister and his own self, but things at Thanksgiving go pretty well until the four bottles of California sauterne have been drunk and people are restless and irritable from sitting so long at the table, the polished mahogany dining-room table, two overlapping tablecloths needed to cover it with its extra leaves inserted. The day is unseasonably warm, and is spotted with fits of rain. The summer's drought has been forgotten. They need frost now. Daffodil and crocus shoots are coming up and the lilac buds have the fullness they should have in April. Some cog has slipped in the sky, clogged as it is with emissions from all our hurrying cars.

Of the Harrison boys, nerdy, divorced Alex has come up from Virginia, and Georgie from New York, still unmarried and no great mystery why, and Ron Junior with his wife, pudgy Margie, and their three children from a new development off the old pike to Maiden Springs. That makes eleven with Nelson and Annabelle, but because Janice owed her so much hospitality and fortifying advice over the years she had invited Doris Dietrich, as she now is, and her elderly rich husband, Henry, whom Doris called Deet. Janice never dreamed Doris would accept but she did, loftily saying they had given the cook the holiday off and she was dreading trying to whip up an elaborate meal just for Deet. He was eighty, at least, and even deafer than Doris. Still, he was tall, held himself erect, and looked distinguished, a county aristocrat, a living reminder of the days when the vast old hosiery mills were still mills and not discount outlets. After much dithering and debate, it was decided to put him on Janice's right, and Annabelle next to him, and Georgie, in Nelson's estimation the least menacing of the Harrisons, on her right.

Annabelle works daily with old people, and does feel comfortable next to Mr. Dietrich, with his handsome long head and little fake-flesh hearing aid and sharp high cheekbones blotched by a stately excitement. He tells her about his travels—the bulky souvenirs his wife insists on buying, the number of times they have been cheated, in Mexico, in Egypt, in Sri Lanka. He conveys his pleasure in being able to support an acquisitive wife and legions of cheats. “Most of these foreigners are rascals,” he says, “but you can't blame them, since they labor under the misfortune of not being Americans.” And he looks down at her sideways slyly, to see how she takes that, and turns to Nelson's mother on his other side, asking, “Isn't that right, Janice? Did you hear what I said to the delightful young lady?”

“No, Deet darling, say it again to me!”

Mrs. Harrison is tense. Her dark eyes—like Nelson's, but moister, female, and less lashy, shrunken by age—have been shuttling up and down the table, watching all those faces connected to her. With a little step-grandson on her other side, she has lurched at the old man's overture.

On Annabelle's other side, Georgie asks her about Broadway shows. He cannot believe she's never seen “Cats” or “Miss Saigon.” But he obliges her with a description of a show called “Keep Bangin,’ ” which consists of nothing but men playing drums. He offers to get her and Nelson tickets: “People here really live so much closer to New York than they realize. The most a*mazing* production I've seen lately has the rather embarrassing title ‘The Vagina Monologues,’ a one-woman show, and it's really more serious than it sounds. It's about us and our bodies. All of us.”

“Nelson and I don't really go around together like that,” she must point out. “We just discovered each other recently.”

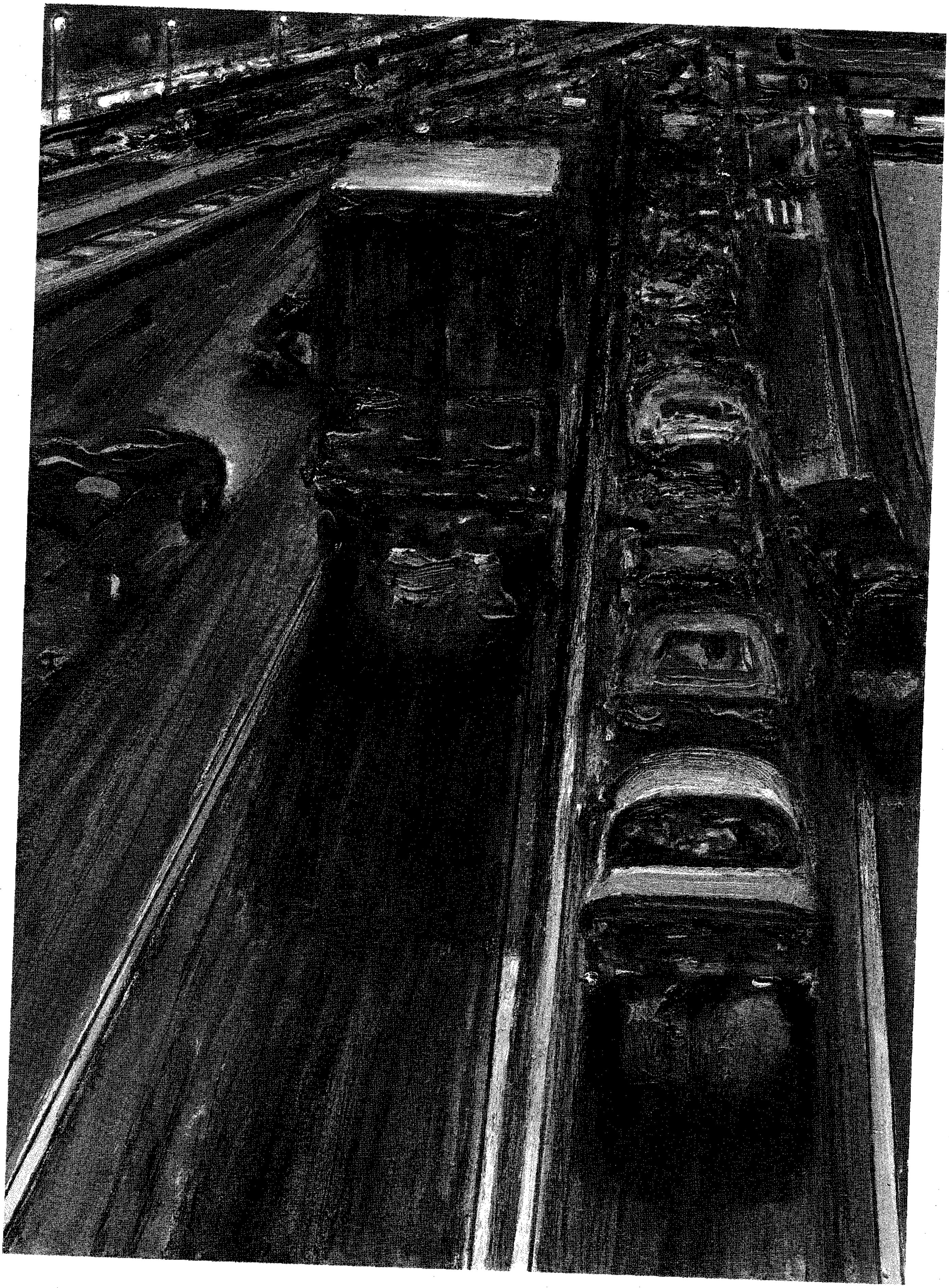
“What a remarkable thing,” he says, eager to follow any lead she gives him. She makes him uneasy, she realizes. A grin is held on his face like a firecracker ready to go off. His face is theatrically large-featured, and sun-wrinkled like a farmer's, from beaches and vacations, she supposes. He has a marathoner's unnatural leanness. He asks, “You grew up around here?”

“Sure did.”

“And you don't want to get away? I was always dying to. I wanted to dance and did make a few chorus lines, but never in shows that had long runs, that was just my luck.”

Nelson sits at the far end of the table, between Mrs. Dietrich and the squat, opinionated Margie. Annabelle knows her type: knockouts as seventeen-year-old cheerleaders, with their chunky sturdy legs in white bobby socks and big boobs in bulky sweaters, but then sinking into plumpness and petulance. Between Margie and Janice the two older children, restless boys, sit and stare across at Annabelle with undisguised curiosity. On the other side of Georgie are his two brothers, Alex and then Ron Junior, in turn next to his youngest child, a girl in a high chair, and next to her her grandfather, who as the wine bottle in front of him empties becomes increasingly cozy with Mrs. Dietrich. Her leathery form is adorned with lots of draggy metal jewelry, as if for some other occasion, a gaudier and more fashionable one than this.

Mrs. Harrison, Annabelle thinks, has the air less of the hostess than of a guest lucky to be there, increasingly



PAINTINGS BY WAYNE THIEBAUD

lightheaded as her wineglass is refilled and the meal she has struggled to prepare is dutifully consumed. She sits nodding at Mr. Dietrich's description of the myriad temples of Myanmar, once known as Burma, the country in Southeast Asia least spoiled by Western tourists thanks to its tough little generals, while resting her glazed eyes on the sight of her husband's head nudging ever closer to Mrs. Dietrich's dangling copper earring. Yet Mr. Harrison, even thus engaged, now and then darts toward Annabelle a look that feels like a hard thrust; it makes her uneasy, it touches her depths.

"And now the bitch is going to run," Doris Dietrich's harsh, seldom contradicted voice leaps from her tête-à-tête. "They have no shame, those two."

The pair of little boys, ten and eight and bored beyond endurance, have been excused until dessert and can be heard banging about in the sunporch beyond the kitchen. Annabelle watches Janice to see when she will get up to clear the dishes, so she can help her; but the hostess makes no move except to sip from her glass, though Mr. Dietrich's braying survey of his adventures abroad has momentarily ceased. His wife's voice, overheard by all but him, has stilled the table.

Frowning down at his untidy plate, Nelson asks, "What does she have to be ashamed of?"

"Well, she's a crook, for one thing," Ron Junior volunteers, in case Doris Dietrich has no ready answer.

"And for another she's no more a New Yorker than I am," Alex adds with a surprising quickness, punching in his data.

The third brother has to chime in. "What's a New Yorker?" Georgie asks. "We're all immigrants there."

"You going to vote for her?" Ron Junior asks him.

Annabelle feels Georgie at her side cringe but muster mettle to reply, "Probably. If it's Giuliani she runs against. He's an uptight control freak who really blew it with this Brooklyn Museum flap. He tried to withhold city funds, it's as bad as art under Communism."

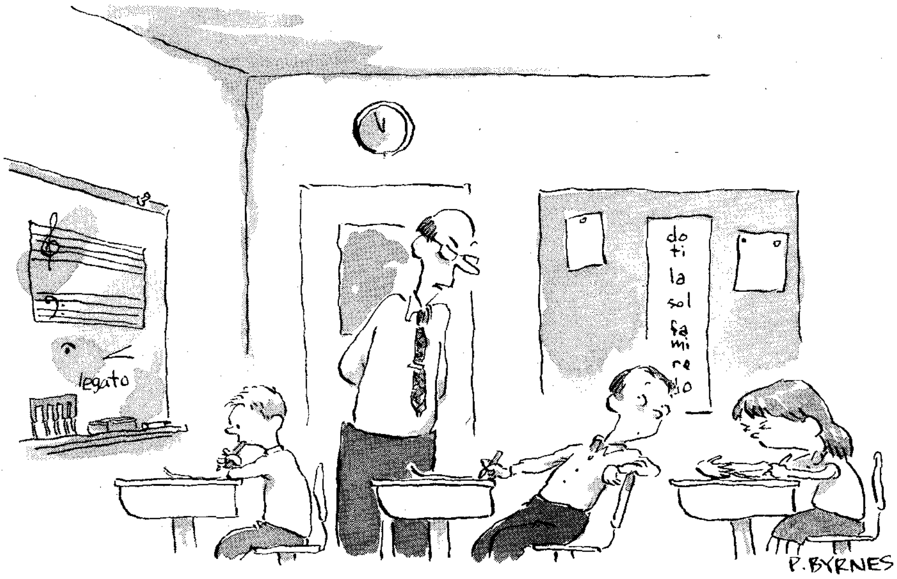
Doris says, the bracelets on her arm jingling as she props her elbow and pulls a smoking cigarette from her mouth, "The city is safer to visit than it's been for twenty years. Deet and I used to be scared to go there and now we're not."

"Maybe that's just demographics," Nelson says. "There are fewer young black men. And thanks to Clinton's boom more of them have jobs."

Alex announces, "Clinton in my book gets no credit whatsoever for the prosperity. It's all due to the American electronics industry. If anything, his taxes have held it back. And now the Department of Justice is going after Microsoft—talk about killing the goose that lays the golden eggs."

"And Alan Greenspan," Deet announces, having caught some of the drift.

"Nelson is defending Clinton, dear," Doris calls down the length of the table to him.



"Mr. Jackson! You know how I feel about sampling."

"And Mrs. Clinton, too," Nelson says. He has a defiant streak, Annabelle sees—a disregard that might be their father in him.

"I think they're both disgusting," Ron Junior's wife puts it, having returned from checking on her two noisy sons. "I blame her as much as him for the Monica mess."

"How so?" Nelson asks.

"Don't play naïve, Nelson."

"She keeps him hard up," their host says, at the head of the table. There is a flushed pinkness to Ronnie's head, in the scalp that shows through his thinned hair, in the tint of his tender-looking eyelids, in the color that glows through his protuberant ears. "Like they used to do for prizefighters."

It's another generation speaking, Annabelle thinks. A coarser, more physical perspective, a rust-belt mentality. This man knew her biological father—played the same auditorium-gyms, inhaled the same coal-smoky air.

"And what about her and Vince Foster?" Ron Junior asks. "Don't think that's not going to come up again if she runs."

"The king and queen of sleaze," his wife goes on, in a kind of rapture. "I can't *stand* them!" This is marriage, Annabelle sees, this joint rapture.

"He has no coattails," Ron Senior says, still thinking practically. "He should have been impeached and we all know it."

"He *was* impeached," Nelson says to his stepfather. "What he shouldn't have been was convicted, and he wasn't, if you'll recall."

His stepfather says patiently, "Nellie, he *lied* to us, the American people. He said right out on television, 'I did not have sex with that woman, What's-her-name.' "

Annabelle feels compelled to speak up. "I think he's an excellent President," she says. Her voice though shy is clean and pure, like the ringing of a fragile bell. The agitated table, smelling of food eaten and uneaten, falls into a hush.

"How so, dear?" Doris Dietrich asks, from the other corner of the table. Her gaudy earrings, strips of copper, swing as she brings her head closer to hear the answer.

Annabelle fights the blush she feels

beginning. She elongates her neck to spread the heat. She loves Clinton, she realizes, from all her lonely bachelor-girl days at the television set, letting his A-student earnestness wash over her, his lip-biting pauses for the judicious word, his gently raspy hillbilly accent. "Oh, the usual things people say," she says. "He really does make you feel he cares—that he *sees* you. He's been there, poor in a crummy town, with an abusive stepfather. And his cleverness, knowing all those facts, and being always right. All those experts saying bombing Kosovo would never work and then it did. And the way he went into Haiti."

"He's a *draft* dodger!" Ron Junior cannot keep from blurting. "If I were a soldier I'd tell him to stuff his orders. Don't send *me* to Bosnia!"

"You all asked, let her answer," Nelson says, as if running a group.

She goes on, hating making a speech, blushing hotly now, but, after all, her President had kept going, doing his job, with the entire country full of cheap and ugly cracks. "He loves people. And he has nerve. He knows when to gamble and when to hold back. And he doesn't hold a grudge, even against those in the Congress who hated him and tried to ruin him. Yes, it was too bad about—about his needing a little affection, but maybe he was entitled to some. Aren't we all?"

"A blow job is a little affection?" the host asks, giving her again one of those looks, a thrust from some past where she didn't exist.

"Well—"

"Of course," Nelson intervenes. "That's just what it is."

"That right, Georgie?" Alex asks his younger brother.

"Drop dead, Lex. Go back to the Bible Belt."

Deet has heard enough to know they are talking about Clinton; he says, in that commanding deaf voice, "The man may have his good intentions, but he is too extreme, giving all this government money to those who refuse to work. Raising taxes on the rich hurts the economy over all, history shows time and time again."

"He's *for* workfare," Nelson says, almost suffocated by the ignorance around him. "The liberals hate him for it."

"He makes me ashamed of being an American," Margie volunteers. Something in her akin to sexual passion has been tripped; her face shows spots of outgrown acne. "He makes America look ridiculous, drowning us in sleaze and then flying around all over the world as if nothing whatsoever has happened. It's so *brazen*."

Her little girl, two or so, is too big to be penned into a high chair this long; hearing her mother's voice strain, feeling her mother's blood boil, she begins to kick and whimper. With an irritable backhand she flicks her peas and cut-up turkey off the tray onto the floor. "Hey, take it easy, Alice," says Ron Junior, who has been hit in his necktie by some of the peas.

"Well," his father says, "I'll say this for Slick Willie, he's brought the phrase out in the open. When I was young you had to explain to girls what it was. They could hardly believe it."

Nelson says to Margie, beside him, "He's still President, for Chrissake," and calls to Deet, loudly, "Actually, Mr. Dietrich, fiscally he's about as conservative as a Democrat can get. We're feeling the pinch at the treatment center, I can tell you."

Alex speaks up: "He makes Nixon look like a saint. At least Nixon had the decency to get out of our faces. He could feel shame."

"Nixon? I never heard him admit anything except how sorry he felt for himself," Nelson says.

"It's the *sleaze!*" Margie cries in a kind of orgasm, visibly quivering. Alice starts to whimper in sympathy. Her mother gestures toward her. "What are children supposed to think? What do you tell Boy Scouts?"

"Boy Scouts!" Georgie exclaims, a big grin creasing his face. "Keep your mind out of the gutter, that's what our scoutmaster used to tell us. But none of us did, including him."

"A much maligned man," Deet announces, having heard the word "Nixon." "What he did then would be shrugged off now."

"Like Reagan shrugged off Iran-Contra," Nelson says. "Not that he had a clue what they were talking about. Talk about senile dementia!"

"He made the Russkies bite the dust, I'll tell you. He brought the damn Wall down," says Ron Senior, lifting the bot-

"You're not standing in the designated protest area."

• •

tle in front of him and finding that it is empty. "Janice, is there any more wine? Is it all drunk up at your end?"

Doris Dietrich beside him also calls down to Janice. "Janice, what do you think? What do you think about Hillary's running?"

Janice tries to focus, to wake up. She tells the expectant table, "Oh, I think she should run if it makes her feel better. Let her get it out of her system. Ronnie, you've had enough wine. It's time to clear, but everybody except Annabelle stay sitting. She may help me."

Her attempt to protect the girl fails, for everybody except the Dietrichs and Margie and Alice picks up dirty dishes and crowds into the kitchen. Ron Junior's two boys have taken Ron Senior's golf clubs out of his closet to the sunporch and set up a kind of putting course among overturned summer furniture. They are taking fuller and fuller swings, and their father gets to them just before something is broken—the rippled-glass table where they sometimes eat in the summer, a panel of new Fiberglas screening. "We're going to have pies, boys," Janice promises them, and then remembers that she should have been warming the apple and mince in the oven instead of just sitting there listening to everybody argue.

LETTER TO THE DEAD

Friends, nothing has changed
in essence.

Wages don't cover expenses,
wars persist without end,
and there are new and terrible viruses,
beyond the advances of medicine.
From time to time, a neighbor
falls dead over questions of love.
There are interesting films, it is true,
and, as always, voluptuous women
seducing us with their mouths and legs,
but in matters of love
we haven't invented a single position that's new.

Some astronauts stay in space
six months or more, testing
equipment and solitude.
In each Olympics new records are predicted
and in the countries social advances and setbacks.
But not a single bird has changed its song
with the times.

We put on the same Greek tragedies,
reread "Don Quixote," and spring
arrives on time each year.

There is a milling about at the kitchen counter as the guests deposit plates and glasses and silver. Annabelle starts rinsing the plates into the Disposall and stacking them in the dishwasher, whose baby-blue interior is new to her. Her host comes over to help, which is his right, it being his kitchen. But it brings him very close, his sports jacket off and his sleeves rolled up so the blond-white fur of forearm hair shows; he lightly bumps Annabelle aside and takes the wet plates into his hands. There is a density to him, a fullness of blood that her own veins feel. "We'll load all the big plates into the lower rack and save the saucers for the next load."

"I can move away, Mr. Harrison, if you'd like to do it."

"Why? This works. You rinse, I load." He is close enough that she smells the sweet sauterne around his red-eared head. "So," he says, "a blow job's just a way of showing affection."

"That's what I said." She has dealt in her life with so many older men coming on to her that she feels calm with it, confident she can fend.

"You're your mother's daughter, all right."

"I am?"

"I knew your mother, once. Before she got involved with that jerk Angstrom."

"Oh?" Fear and fascination twitter together inside her. Her hand trembles, setting the delicate old wineglasses, family treasures with etched designs, into the upper rack. He takes them from her two at time, and rearranges those she has set in place.

"Otherwise, they rattle around and break," he explains.

"What was she like?" She asks this but has already decided she doesn't want the conversation to continue. She half turns from him, looking for a towel to dry her hands.

Ronnie keeps his voice low, so Janice, putting her pies belatedly into the oven, doesn't hear. "She'd fuck anybody," he says softly into the fine hair at the side of Annabelle's neck.

"Why didn't you do that before?" Nelson is whining at his mother.

"Oh, it slipped my mind," she says, "everybody getting so excited about Clinton. Isn't his term about up, in any case?"

"Not soon enough," Ron Junior shouts from the sunporch, where he is administering a paternal scolding.

"It must feel funny," Ronnie murmurs to Annabelle, "being the illegitimate daughter of a hooer and a bum."

Tears spring to her eyes as if at the lash of a twig while walking in the woods. Nelson sees the change in her face, sees her wheel from the sink with her wet hands still up in the air, and in two steps is at her side. "What happened?" he asks, his breath hot, his eyes sunk deeper into his skull.

"Nothing," she gasps, struggling not to sob.

"What did he say?"

"He didn't say anything."

"I asked her," Ronnie tells his stepson

Some habits, rivers, and forests are lost.
Nobody sits in front of his house anymore
or takes in the breezes of afternoon,
but we have amazing computers
that keep us from thinking.

On the disappearance of the dinosaurs
and the formation of galaxies
we have no new knowledge.
Clothes come and go with the fashions.
Strong governments fall, others rise,
countries are divided,
and the ants and the bees continue
faithful to their work.

Nothing has changed in essence.

We sing congratulations at parties,
argue football on street corners,
die in senseless disasters,
and from time to time
one of us looks at the star-filled sky
with the same amazement we had
when we looked at caves.
And each generation, full of itself,
continues to think
that it lives at the summit of history.

—*Affonso Romano DeSant'Anna*

(*Translated, from the Portuguese, by Mark Strand.*)

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conversationally, "how it felt being the bastard kid of a whore and a bum. I didn't ask her for a blow job, though."

"Ronnie!" Janice exclaims, letting the oven door slam.

"Well, shit," he says, only a bit abashed, "what's she doing here, anyway, telling us what a great guy Clinton is?"

Nelson squares up to him, though he is a bit shorter and was never an athlete. "You *told* Mom she could come. You said you wanted to see how Ruth Leonard's daughter turned out."

"Now I know. Looks just like her, without the ginger in her hair. And cunt, my guess is." Buried years of righteous resentment surface in the cool guess.

"You couldn't stand it, could you?" Nelson says. "My father beating you out every time. Every time you went up against him, he beat you out. That's how he was, Ronnie. A winner. You, you're a loser."

"You'd know," Ronnie says.

Others have pushed into the kitchen, the older two Harrison sons. "What's going on?" Georgie asks.

"*Mom*," Nelson asks his mother. "*Why* did you marry him? How could you do that to us?" The "us," he realizes, must include his dead father.

Janice looks as though she has had this conversation with her son before, and is very weary of it. "He's good to me," she explains. "He's had too much to drink. Haven't you, Ron?"

"No," he says. "Not quite enough. You drank it all at your end."

"Please forget whatever he said," she says to Annabelle. "Let's go for a walk, some of us. While the pies warm up."

"The rain has started up again," Alex points out.

Ron Junior, in from the sunporch, wants to defend his father but doesn't quite know from what. "You squirt," he says to Nelson. "This was all your crazy idea, bringing *her*."

"It's thrown him for a loop." Georgie offers to explain, from his New York angle, seeing his father with a detachment the other two haven't managed yet, as an old man getting older. "She got him stirred up, with memories."

"I am not stirred up," Ronnie says, with the oblivious stolidity of the insurance salesman who will not go away, who will not leave the house until a policy has been sold. "This is my house and I like to have some control over who comes into it."

"Well, we're going," Nelson tells him. "This is it. Mom, I'll come by for my things when this pig isn't here."

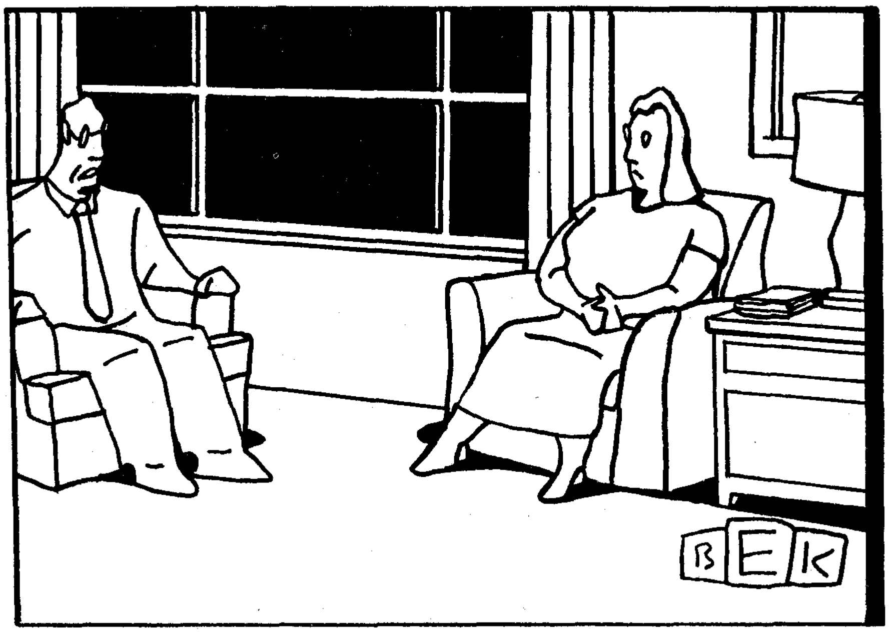
"Nelson, you have no place to stay!"

"I'll find one. Come on, Annabelle. Here," and he dodges around Ronnie, startlingly, and rips a generous length of paper towel from the rack under the old-fashioned wooden cabinets and hands it to his sister, to dry her hands with.

Numb, heaped with disgrace, she follows him back into the dining room, past the tall breakfront where the precious family china trembles at their double retreat. Nelson remembers how his grandmother Bessie Springer had all but worshipped this china, inherited from her people, the Koerners. Annabelle has to hurry with little steps to keep up. She dressed for this occasion in a white cashmere cardigan and cinnamon-brown skirt, perhaps a little tight and short for the company. But that's how skirts come now, from New York via the buyers for the malls.

Only Margie, little Alice, and the Dietrichs are left at the Thanksgiving table. A cloud of Doris's cigarette smoke lies up against the ceiling, like a secondary, ghostly table. Nelson stops to bend down and say loudly, "Mr. Dietrich, I'm sorry, but something has come up and we must run before the pies. Happy Thanksgiving. You, too, Mrs. Dietrich. Keep being a friend to Mom, she needs you. Margie, I guess we don't agree entirely about Clinton but that's a very cute little girl you have there."

"Goodbye," Annabelle says to the table in a scarcely audible croak, her throat sore from her choked-down sobs. She dabs at her wet cheeks with the paper towel, held in the hand that



"What goes around comes around more annoying."

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Nelson isn't squeezing as he pulls her along. The two small boys have made their way ahead of them into the living room and have turned on the Zenith television. A football game: blue-and-silver uniforms deploy on a bright-green ground with a yellow ten-yard line supplied by computer graphics. The top of the set is crammed with knickknacks, including a heavy pale-green glass egg that since his earliest childhood has seemed miraculous to Nelson. How did they get that tear-shaped bubble in there?

He has no coat, and Annabelle's polar-fleece jacket hangs in the hall. The front door sticks in the dampness of the day, but with a screech pops open, releasing them to the porch and its fresh air. It is raining; the air is chilly, alive. As a child he always loved this porch, his Springer grandparents' porch, where there was a squeaky cushioned glider. And there had been an armchair of unpainted wicker. The wicker smelled to his childish nostrils of its vegetable origin, of a willow tree in a storybook, leaning beside a pond trailing its drooping branches and feathery leaves in the clean water. His senses feel clean again, the rain sharp on his face, the patter in the maple leaves overhead distinct, each drop, as he tugs his sister toward the tired Corolla he brought her in. The house across the street, which had jack-o'-lanterns in the window a month ago, is dark, empty. The neighbors are away for the holiday, and thus miss seeing the heir leave 89 Joseph Street for good.

Christmas lights are up in Brewer, from a string of multicolored twinkle bulbs swagged in the window of the 7-Eleven on Almond Street to the green-and-red-floodlit concrete eagles at the top of the twenty-story county courthouse; Nelson can see this top, with its red-tipped flagpole, from his apartment's side window if he presses his face against the glass. He walks home from work now, and enjoys the ten blocks west from Weiser Street past the old cough-drop factory, still faintly smelling of menthol after all these years. Already they know Nelson at the 7-Eleven, and he knows the people who man the counter and guard the till: the slangy, hefty bleached blonde who sometimes has her ten-year-old boy doing homework over in the corner behind the ten-cent photocopy machine; the girl with indifferent skin and close-cropped hair and a single tuft dyed green, always reading a fat college textbook and acting annoyed if you say anything friendly; the oldish man with a pleading, watery-eyed look and a very modest command of English, some kind of refugee from Communism's evaporated empire; the alarmingly big black guy, his head shaved, who has a rap and hip-hop station turned loud on the radio and is usually on the phone talking unintelligibly in Caribbean English. They hardly notice now when Nelson comes in around five-thirty and buys his microwave dinner for the night, and a half-pint carton of milk for his cereal, to sit overnight on the windowsill. The December nights have been so unseasonably warm the milk quickly sours.

Nelson finds TV stupid but he likes the Technicolor fire of it, the way it flares up within a few seconds of his coming in the door and punching it on. A genie when you rub a lamp, a multitude of genies. He watches until he feels his intelligence being too rudely insulted, or his patience being too arrogantly tested by the commercials, which interrupt at an ever greedier ratio when the program gets interesting. Yet some commercials he waits for eagerly. There is a stern-looking young woman advertising Suppress, "the strongest deodorizer you can buy without a prescription." She is dark-complected and has utterly no fat on her except in her quite full lips. As her pitch progresses, and her body jigs and jags across the screen, she sweats increasingly and at the climax pops a muscle, cocking her arm with a devilish sideways look right out at him. She works out hard and would fuck hard, the implication is.

He is waiting for some woman to call. Mom calls, to check on how he is, but there is more and more space between her calls. Local real estate is lively, as if at the end of the year—the century, the millennium, even—people were agitated and looking for some sort of renewal by changing shelter. She herself is looking forward to Florida, where she still has the condo in Deleon, once Christmas and the visit from her grandchildren is over. "To be frank, Nelson, I almost dread it, it will seem so peculiar, with you not in the house."

He is firm. "Ronnie acted like a prick to my sister, and those other Harrisons weren't much better. You were O.K., but just barely. After all, you were married to Dad for thirty-three years."

"Well, his having a love child doesn't sweeten my memories necessarily."

He smiles at the quaint phrase "love

child.” Nelson has always been close to his mother. It was drummed into him that he took after the Springers, little and dark-eyed. This sudden sister, this love child, is a chance to draw closer to Dad, Dad’s side within him.

Yet lunch with Annabelle at the Greenery feels like a pullback. Elm Street is bleak in December, and part of the bleakness is the uncanny warmth—it’s over sixty today, wiping out any anticipation of a white Christmas. The Greenery seems demoralized. The only Christmas decorations up are some flattened white balls of a glimmering ersatz material in the window and against the mirrors behind the counter: not round real Christmas balls but balls in two and a half dimensions, like some computer graphic. Once again he apologizes to Annabelle for his extended family’s bad behavior.

“It was bound to be awkward,” she says. “I never should have gone.”

“My mistake. I couldn’t imagine anybody’s not seeing you as I do.”

“And how is that, Nelson?”

“As a lovely person,” he says. *A love child.* He has an impulse to put his hands on hers where they rest, short-nailed and broad, on the Formica tabletop. She pulls her hands back as if reading his mind.

“I’m not such a lovely person, Nelson,” she says. “I’ve done things, and had them done to me.”

“We all have,” he says. As the words leave his mouth they sound lamely big-brotherish to him. “That’s life,” he adds, which is also dumb. But what was she talking about, exactly?

“I think,” Annabelle says, “we should rest easy for a while. You’re living alone and have things to sort out with your family. I’m not really your family.”

Like those white Christmas balls that aren’t really balls. “You *are*, damn it.”

“I’ll be going away for Christmas and some days after. A girl I’m really close to, we were in training together and she quit to get married just before she would have got her cap, she and her husband have invited me to go with them to Las Vegas, and, you know, I figured why not, I’ve never been there or hardly *any*where. They say if you don’t gamble everything else is pretty cheap. There are all these fantastic new buildings you can wander around in.”

“Hey, you must look up my Aunt Mim. *Your* Aunt Mim. Your father’s sister. Seriously. She’s a real card, honest. She runs a beauty parlor out there. I don’t know what name she uses now, but Miriam Angstrom is her maiden name and I’ll call and give you her number to call. I’ll call her and warn her. Please do it. *Please.* It won’t be awkward, I know.” It relieves him to think of her taken care of on the holiday, so he can sneak over to Ronnie and Mom’s without a bad conscience. He wonders if everybody has a conscience like his, crimped early and always uneasy.

“I don’t want to, Nelson. It’ll be one more thing.”

“Suit yourself,” he says, sharply. She has rejected one of the few presents he could give her, a treasure out of his own genes. “I’ll get her number to you but not tell her you’re coming.” The dispirited atmosphere inside the Greenery is getting to him. He and this half stranger keep running out of things to say. Finally he asks her, resorting to television news, “So what do you think? Should the little Cuban boy be sent back to his father in that miserable country or kept in Disney World?”

“Sent back to his father.”

“I agree.” It was as uncanny as the weather, the way he and she agreed about everything.

And his wife calls. Pru’s voice is lighter, more girlish than he remembers. “Nelson, what got into you to leave your mother’s at last?”

“It felt crowded. Ronnie’s a prick, like my father always said.”

“This so-called sister—did *she* put you up to it?”

“No, Annabelle would never put pressure that way.”

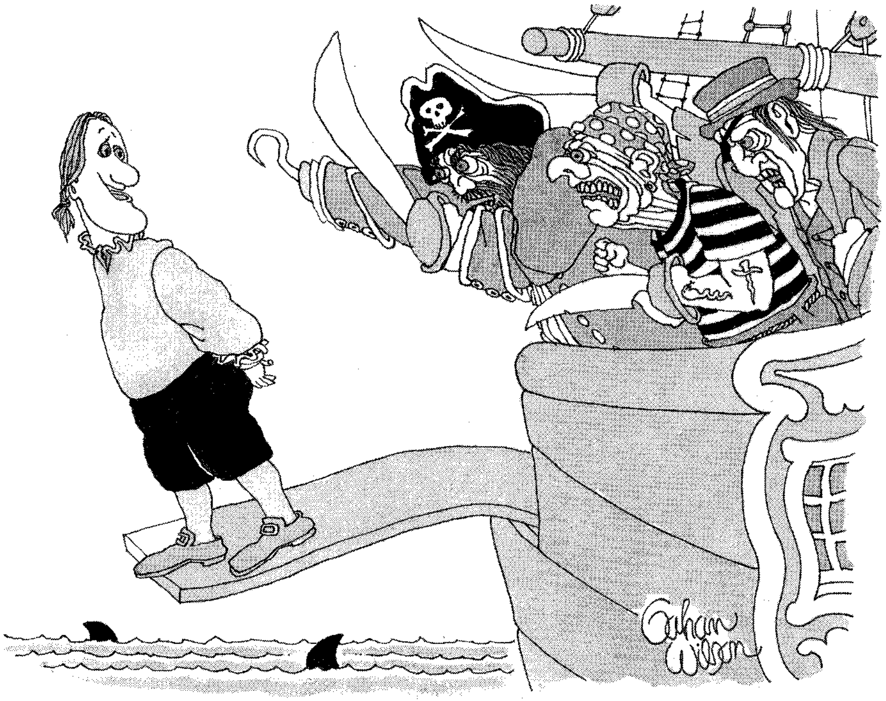
“Well, she got you to do something I never could.”

“Oh? You were never that clear. You were ambivalent, like me. It was a free ride, with a built-in babysitter.”

She pauses, checking her memory against his. He can picture her lips, drawn back in thought in her bony face, like an astronaut’s when the G’s of force begin to tug. She says, “Maybe it was Pennsylvania I needed to get out of. It’s all very dear and friendly, but there’s this thick air or whatever, this moral undertone. I think Judy is better off without all that to rebel against.”

“How’s your life, by the way, in the romance department?”

He wouldn’t have dared ask a week ago, but moving out has given him a fresh footing in the world. She left him six seasons ago, in the dog days of August. She had complained about living with his mother and Ronnie and about his dead-end job babysitting these pa-



“Well, I guess this is goodbye.”

thetic dysfunctionals, boosting his own ego, caring more about them than he did about his own wife and children, but what it boiled down to in his baffled mind was something she shouted, her green eyes bright as broken glass in her reddened face: *My life with you is too small!* Too small. As if being a greaseball lawyer's secretary and handy lay was bigger. But the size of a life is how you feel about it. Pru was one of seven children and, though her useless father, a former steamfitter, is dead of too many Buds and her wispy little lace-curtain-Catholic mother sits in assisted-living housing, she has six siblings and their broods to give her a big noisy theatre to do her aunt act in. Whereas Aunt Mim had only him. And now Annabelle.

"It's great, Mr. Nosy," says Pru. "Actually, I've given Gekopoulos notice, beginning next year. I'd like something more having to do with people, maybe in public relations. Slapping up injury claims and divorce settlements out of glossarized boilerplate isn't exactly non-repetitive."

He suppresses the insight that life as a whole isn't exactly non-repetitive and tries to be supportive. She is spending Christmas with her mother and siblings and then driving to him, all the way across the great commonwealth, its mountains and mills and quarries and farms, along the Turnpike for eight or nine hours at least, Judy spelling her at the wheel, Roy playing video games at every rest stop. "When you come here after Christmas, where do you all want to sleep?" he asks. "I have only this one room. You could stay with Mom and Ronnie and I'll have the kids here in sleeping bags. Or is Judy too old for that?"

"Let's think about it," Pru says. "The basic thing is that they see their father."

"Right. But can I say something? It'll be nice for me to see *you*, too."

"Uh-huh," she says, with her Akron tough-girl flatness.

"Let's try to have some fun when you come," he urges. "Life is too short."

"Uh-huh."

The phone rings one evening while he's watching a "Star Trek" rerun. It's not a woman but a male voice from the past, Billy Fosnacht. "I got the number from your mother. I heard you moved out from little Ron Harrison. His wife is one of my patients."

"What a bitch she is. She's far Christian right."

"If you knew her jawbone like I do, you'd feel sorry for her. It's chalk. I've done three implants, with my fingers crossed."

Billy went to dental school in Boston, Tufts it was called. He and Nelson, friends in childhood, used to see each other around Brewer in Nelson's bad-boy days, up at the Laid-Back and other hangouts, but since Nelson got clean ten years ago there's been a fading away. "What's an implant?" he asks.

"What, may I ask, does landscape have to do with gender?"

"Nellie, how can you not know what an implant is? It's what I do. It's an osseo-integrated artificial tooth. The best ones are made in Sweden. You pull the real tooth and you insert a titanium screw with an inner thread as well as an outer and if the bone bonds with it in six months you screw a fake tooth into it and the bite is as good as new. Better than new. I do three, four a day. It's the only time I'm happy, when I'm doing implants."

"You're not happy, Billy?"

"Forget I said that. I'll fill you in later. Let's have lunch. On me. I'm loaded, and no wife to spend it for me."

Billy has learned a new way of talking—punchy, self-mocking, rapid. In their shared boyhood he had been four months older, a few inches taller, and the one to get the latest kiddie fad for a present first. Their conversation reveals that, though their clienteles rarely overlap, they both work at giving fresh starts to members of the Brewer population, and that in middle age both are at personal loose ends. "Sure," says Nelson, of lunch.

They agree to meet downtown, at the restaurant on Weiser Square that was Johnny Frye's Chophouse many years ago and has been revived most recently as Casa di Pasta. The day they meet, as it turns out, is the day after Charles Schulz announced he was ending "Peanuts" and Jimmy Carter went down to Panama to give them the Canal.

"He got to give it away twice," Billy points out. "Once when he was President and now when he's a has-been. You notice Clinton's too smart to show his face. In ten years the Red Chinese will control it, just you watch. Those spicks'll sell it off."

Dad never much liked Billy, complaining about the boy's fat lips. Yet, seeing him, Nelson cannot but warm: here is a partner in his childish dreams, the conspiracy of imagined speed and triumphant violence that boys erect around themselves like a tent in the back yard under the scary stars. Billy, who used to be heavy like his mother, who died years ago of breast cancer, has become weedy

"Damn! He took the car keys with him."

like his father, though taller. His hair, a curly black like neither of his parents', has thinned back from his brow even more decidedly than Nelson's short convict cut, and he has a bald spot at the back of his head the size of a yarmulke. Yes, he says, his dad is still alive, filling in on clarinet in so-called Dixieland bands, though being white is a big disadvantage, and making ends meet in various fishy ways. Yes, he, Billy, has been married—twice, in fact, once to a nice girl from Newton he met up there in New England and then to one of his assistants in his practice down here. The second marriage broke up the first and later developed its own twinges. She was twelve years younger and he didn't want to go out as much as she did and she got tired of his night sweats and his yelling out in his sleep and his moods.

"Moods?" Nelson asks.

"Depressed, irritable, couldn't sleep. Weekends I'd be so beat and bored I'd pray for an emergency to call. Tooth-structure loss I could handle. Wives," he goes on. "They shut down without even knowing they're doing it. The fancy stuff goes and then even the basics are cut back to once a week, then twice a month, and then just holidays and trips abroad. Portugal, Austria, Acapulco—all that way just to get a little nooky from my lawful wedded."

"Well, in my case," Nelson begins, but Billy overrides him.

"And then when you suggest maybe this marriage isn't working, they act stunned and tell their lawyers to go for all they can get, this isn't their idea."

Years of dealing with people while their mouths are immobilized has made Billy an easy conversational partner, who needs very little prompting. "Yelling out in your sleep?" Nelson asks.

The waitress, who looks almost like the sweaty olive-skinned beauty in the Suppress commercial, interrupts with the day's specials. Billy orders bow ties with diced shrimp and Nelson the mushroom ravioli. Both decline wine in favor of water. "Have the sparkling Pellegrino, it costs what wine does," Billy says. "This is on me, remember." He tells Nelson, "Yeah, awful dreams. In one of them I'm crammed into the trunk of a car, my face right up against the jack, and I can see the car—you know how in dreams you can see things from inside and out both—being slid into a river, like that mother did to those kids in South Carolina five years ago. In another dream I'm in one place and my house is burning in another, and I can't get to it, even though I can see the flames burning through the floor right at my feet." He pauses. "So, what do you think?"

So—this is why he's asked Nelson to lunch, to get free therapy. It wasn't just those good old days tenting out in the back yard. Nelson grudges being a wise man outside the treatment center. He says, "We don't do dreams much in therapy anymore. There's no time. The insurance companies want fast action—in because of some crisis, 'Here, take these pills,' out."

"Listen, Nelson. Forget the dreams. I have attacks in the middle of the day. I break out in a sweat like I'm on a treadmill. I can feel my heart doing double time. I think about death, about being sealed in a little lead box and the whole universe going on, rotating, exploding, whatever the hell all it does, on and on and eventually pooping out while I'm still in there, totally forgotten. I'm going to *die*, I can't get it out of my head. You have to wear these latex gloves now, and I have the fantasy a little drop of blood is going to seep through from some gay guy's gums and give me AIDS. All it takes is one little drop from a micro-abrasion. It's taking the pleasure out of doing implants."

Nelson has to laugh, his old friend is so self-obsessed, so solemn in his mental misery. "By our age, Billy, we should have come to terms with this stuff."

"Have you?"

"I think so. It's like a nap, only you don't wake up and have to find your shoes." He is being hard-hearted; there is agony here, even if Billy is a comical old friend. Not only are his lips fat but his nose has gotten fat; it sits there in the middle of his face like something added, its flesh faintly off-color. Nelson advises, more compassionately, "Anxiety disorders level off, usually. The human organism gets tired of sustaining them and finds a distraction."

"Nellie, I can't do *tunnels*. I'm not that crazy about bridges, either, especially the Running Horse, the way it arches up. But how can I go to conferences in New York if I can't do a tunnel? I have to go all the way up to Fort Lee and sweat it out on the George Washington."

"You're lucky," Nelson tells him. "There aren't any tunnels around Brewer."

"No, but there are underpasses. I have to force myself to drive through that one at Eisenhower and Seventh. I have zero tolerance for being enclosed. Even here, you notice, I had to get the chair nearer the exit. Airplanes—I haven't been on one since Moira and I split up. They're tunnels that go five miles high."

"How did you handle these fears,"

Nelson asks, "when you were married?"

Billy lifts his hands, superclean and with wrinkled fingertips from being so much in latex gloves, to let the waitress put his mound of bow ties and diced shrimp in front of him. "Shoshana," he answers, "was kind of jittery herself, and I was the stabilizer. With Moira, like I said, we flew all these places to get her to put out, and I toughed it out."

The waitress sets down Nelson's hot ravioli, the steam fragrant of mushrooms, of secretive gray-black fungoid growth, of damp earth, of greenhouses.

Billy talks on: "Maybe I was too young to think then that I was really going to die. I mean *really*, totally—zip—zero. You will be *nada*. I can't eat." He puts his fork down.

Nelson picks up his own fork, saying, "It's a concept the mind isn't constructed to accept. So stop trying to force it to. Come on, eat. Enjoy. Have I told you, Billy, I've discovered I have a sister? No, I'm not kidding."

For Nelson, Christmas feels least phony at the Fresh Start Adult Day Treatment Center, where he works. These unsettled psyches and unwashed bodies, burdens to society and to their families, who in many cases have abandoned them to a life of shelters and halfway houses, respond to the dim old tale—the homeless couple tainted by a mysterious pregnancy, the child born amid straw and dung. Glenn, a scornful bipolar gay with painted blue eyelids and a glittering nostril stud, can play the piano, a skill left over from a closeted adolescence; he extracts the sturdy standard carols from the out-of-tune upright's keyboard while obese, depressive Amy displays a small silvery voice and Dr. Howard Wu a brassy baritone. The doctor's joining in, with Esther Bloom, the center's director, a conspicuous good sport beside him, emboldens the shyer clients: Michael DiLorenzo, letting his cool be slowly thawed, and agoraphobic Rosa, with her new friend the compulsive nail-biter, whose name is Josephine Foote, and Jim the substance abuser, who belts out every first line but whose brain then lets go. All in their ragged fashion get *with* it, taking comfort in the organized noise, the approach to melodic unison, the illusion of happy family there before the tree crammed with artifacts produced in Andrea's art sessions, and in the cookies and cake and ice cream after the sing, the little presents from the staff, all bought at Discount Office Supplies—phallic four-color ballpoint pens for the men and vaginal pocket diaries for the women.

This is Christmas Eve, a Friday. On Christmas morning, before nine, Esther calls. She sounds subdued, even shaky. "Nelson, I thought you should know, since you worked with the DiLorenzo boy."

"Know what?" But the flutter of premonition has already risen in his chest. He just saw Michael yesterday, at the fringe of the crowd around the piano, trying to join in. He had wished him a happy holiday. The boy had responded, "O.K., sir," and looked away. He had neglected to shave. But Nelson took this as a possibly good sign, that his mother's nagging had let up.

"He committed suicide. In the night. They found him this morning. DiLorenzo himself called the center. He was in shock but talked about suing us."

That inner space where Nelson once felt a knife sliding as he tried to empathize with Michael turns more slippery; he feels he is reaching down to bring something back but his hands are soapy and he cannot bring it back, it sinks, it drowns. *You will be nada.* "Oh my God," he tells Esther. "No. How did he do it?"

"With a plastic suit bag. Tied around his neck with a necktie. Sending his parents some kind of message, you could theorize. 'You want dry cleaning, here's dry cleaning.' "

"We lost him. I feel I lost him."

"Nelson, don't be egotistical. We do our best, but we can't do it all. I just wanted you to hear about Michael before it's in the Sunday papers. Everybody uses Perfect; it'll be news." She is brave and crisp but her center has taken a blow, a black mark.

"How serious do you think the father was about suing?"

"Who knows? The man is a doer, he needs to act."

"He kept an appointment with us the day of the hurricane. He trusted us. I should have spotted something, said something to Howie about the meds. The Trilafon wasn't quieting the voices."

"Don't do this to yourself, Nelson. It is not your fault."

That's what they all say. That's what *he* said to them. But when she hangs up the boy is still dead. Sealed under black glass, gliding feet first to nowhere. Nelson pictures Mrs. DiLorenzo lying in a darkened room, the daughters flying in from their disrupted Christmases, the girlishly handsome young face smeared on the inside of an adhesive bubble like an astronaut's helmet. The strength it must take not to rip the suffocating plastic with your fingernails, the furious determination to smother the voices and silence their obscenities.

"Hi. You're back. How was Las Vegas?"

"Nelson, it was a blast. It's the future or something. My girlfriend and her husband talked me into gambling and I won two hundred dollars one night and lost it the next, of course."

"I bet you didn't call my Aunt Mim."

"Well—surprise, surprise—I did, and she couldn't have been sweeter, or funnier. She remembered my mother dimly, from some encounter in a bar that used to be down on Running Horse Street, and had a lot to say about my father. Our father."

"Yeah? What?"

"Oh, what a caring older brother he was, and how hard he worked to perfect his basketball skills. I mean, it didn't just come to him out of the blue. And how supportive and nonjudgmental he always was of her, even after she became a hooker."

"She said that?"

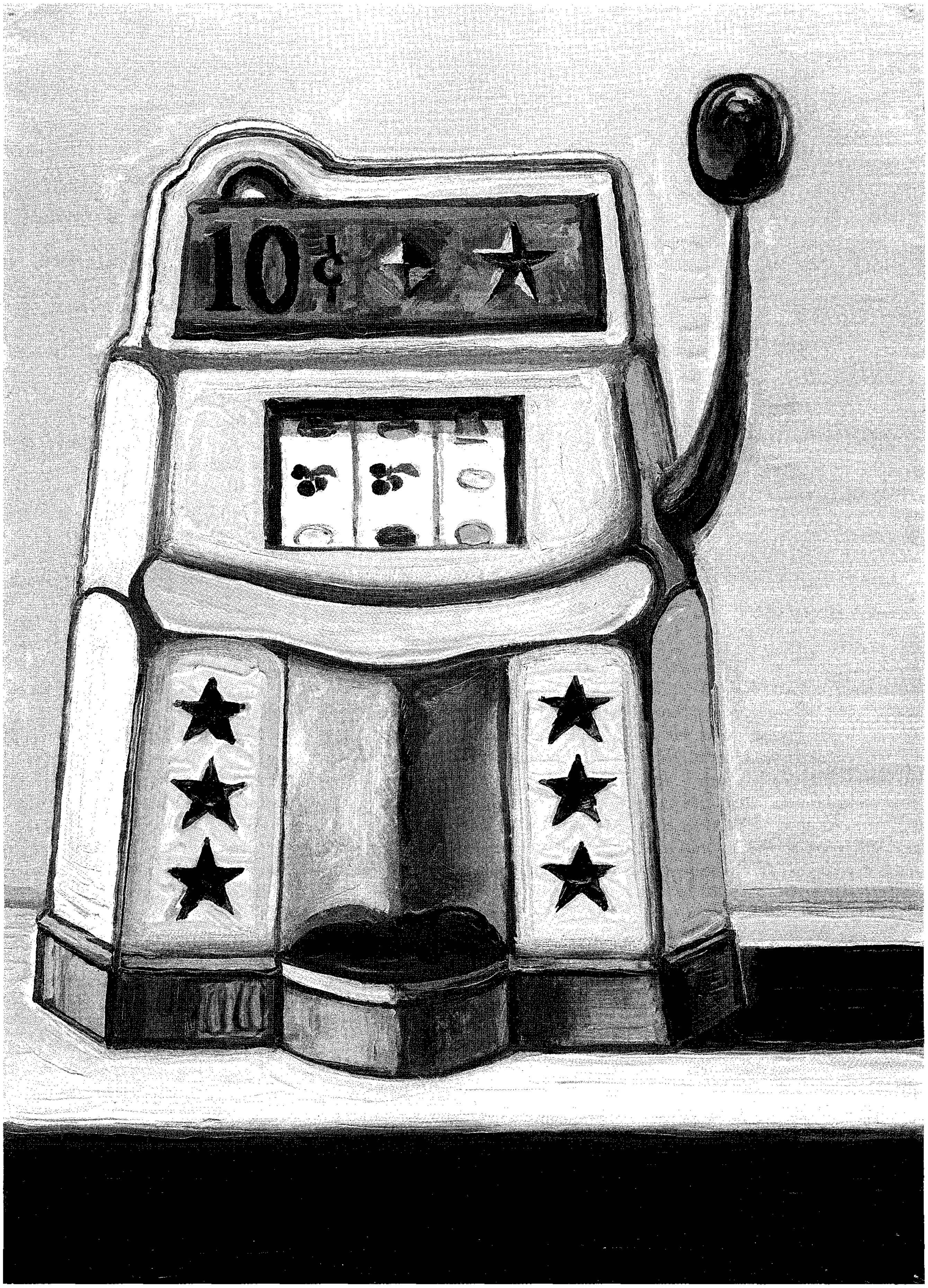
"Sure, why not? She said my mother was never a real hooker, because she wasn't organized in her approach. She even got us into 'O,' at the Cirque du Soleil, if that's how you pronounce it. It beats anything you could ever see in New York—underwater ballet and bungee jumpers and a boat that rises right up into the air! I was absolutely stunned."

"Well," he complains, "while you were having such a great time, I ate Christmas dinner alone and had a young patient over at the center commit suicide."

"Oh, Nelson, no! How terrible! Was he one of yours?"

"We don't divide them up that way, but I had counselled him. I thought he was getting better—more engaged, and reporting no auditory hallucinations. Shows how little I know."

"Well, you shouldn't blame yourself,"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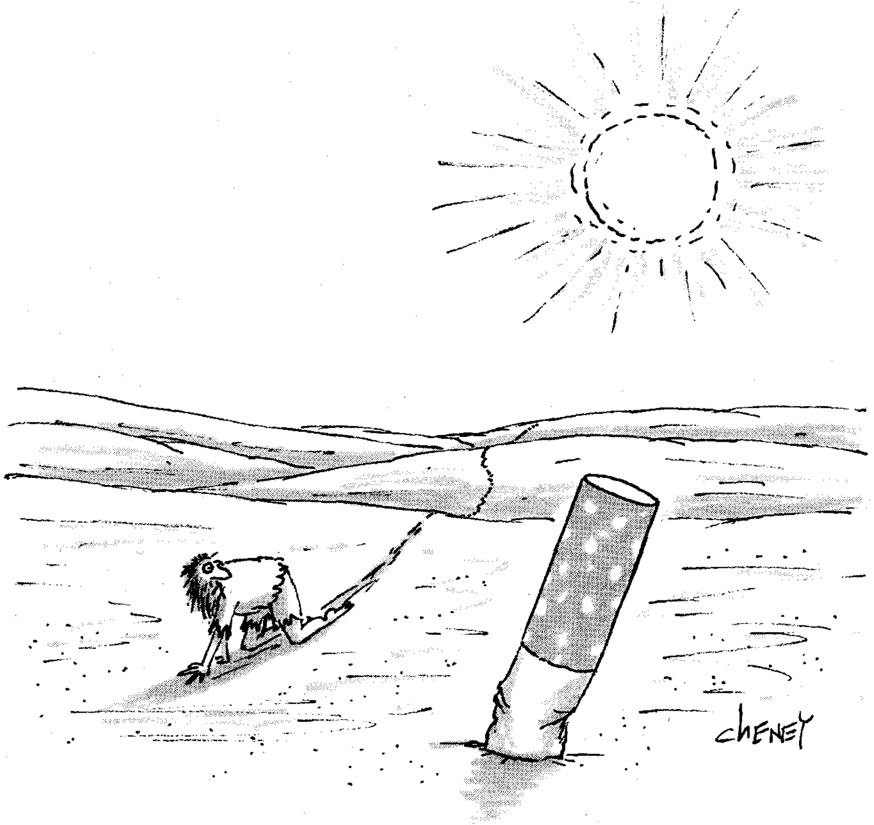

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Annabelle goes on in her practical, kind, slightly out-of-focus voice. "We're caregivers, not miracle workers. Just before I went away Mr. Potteiger died. He was eighty-six and terribly frail, with hardly any use of his legs, but such a sharp, frisky mind. He used to flirt! One morning I showed up at his rooms, he was in elderly housing over toward Oriole, and a little Post-it note on the door said he'd passed away. Just those words. 'Passed Away.' "

"It's not exactly the same," Nelson begins to explain, but she cuts him short.

"How's your lovely family? Did they arrive?"

"Yeah, sort of."

"Sort of?"

"Judy didn't come. She wanted to stay with her boyfriend in his apartment—the roommate is off for the holidays skiing in Colorado—and then go with him, the boyfriend, to this big millennial blast in formal clothes in some fancy home the boyfriend knows the son of up in Silver Lake, old rubber money. The guy sounds like a real sponge."

"I *knew* you'd say 'sponge'!"

"She and Pru had a big fight about it and finally Pru gave up—after all, the kid *will* be twenty next month, and she didn't ask to go to Akron, she's just trying to make the best of the situation we handed her—and drove all the way herself, Pru, just with Roy; she was *beat* when she arrived, about nine o'clock Monday night, they had kept stopping at what used to be Howard Johnson'ses." It makes him weary, his tongue thick, just to think about his aging, uncontrollable family.

"Where are they staying?"

"What's with all these questions? At Mom's. It's too small and crummy here, and the morning traffic out on Eisenhower shakes the place."

"That's *sad*, Nelson," his sister was saying. "Roy at least should be over with you."

"Yeah, but I have to work, the center is shorthanded this week, the suicide has driven the clients crazier. And Roy and Ronnie get along oddly great. They talk about megabytes and RAMs and sit up there at the computer all day, cruising the Internet for God knows what. Filth, probably."

"And how do you feel about your daughter's not coming to visit? Are you hurt?"

"Relieved, in a way. She's gotten to be a handful. She's a redhead, like her mother."

"But she needs to see her father."

"Pru told her that, and Judy said if he doesn't care enough about me to come out here why should I go there and miss an event that only comes once every thousand years? She doesn't seem to think it'll happen in Brewer, only in Akron."

"Well," Annabelle says primly, "it doesn't sound very satisfactory. When am I going to meet Pru, and my dear little nephew?"

"That's what we need to talk about. What are you doing Friday night?"

"That's the—"

"I know. The last of the last."

"I was just going to go to bed and let it wash over me."

"Yeah, me, too, but Pru is as bad as her daughter. She wants to *do* something. I don't want you to come to Mom's house ever again, not after Thanksgiving, but maybe we could swing by that evening and pick up Pru and say hello to Roy and go out to a meal and a movie. I don't want to go to any dance or anything."

"You with two women? That's weird, Nelson."

"No kidding. I agree. But there's this guy I used to play with as a kid, my best friend you could say, now he's a dentist who does Swedish implants, who called me up for lunch the other week and really seems a kind of lost soul. He was married twice but isn't now. Suppose he joined us? His name is Billy Fosnacht."

"It still sounds weird. Two people I never met, and you."

"Listen, do you trust your brother or not? You'll have no problem with Pru, everybody likes her, and Billy's a kind of loser—my father used to call him a goon—but it's not like it's a date, he'll just be along. He makes great money, by the way. You have any better plans?" This is cruel, perhaps.

She doesn't say yes or no. She says, "They say there may be terrorist attacks."

"In Brewer? On what? The pretzel factories?"

"The mayor of Seattle cancelled their celebration today."

"He has the Space Needle to worry about."

"Nelson, I hope you know what

you're doing." This is Annabelle's way of agreeing.

"No," he says, feeling cheerful for the first time this terminal week, "I don't, frankly."

"And this is my son, Roy."

Annabelle says, in auntly fashion, "What a *tall* boy. It's wonderful to meet you, Roy."

They are all, including Billy Fosnacht, bunched awkwardly in the living room, crowded in the insufficient space between the cut-plush sofa and cobbler's-bench coffee table on one side and the Christmas tree and the Zenith television with its jumbly crown of knickknacks on the other. Pru and Annabelle have shaken hands like two big cats brushing whiskers, and Ronnie and Mom have been excessively friendly to the round-faced girl who appeared at the door in September. Annabelle is wearing a short red dress with a high collar and a diagonal zipper across the bosom, and dark net stockings on her prominent legs—all a little whorish, Nelson thought when he picked her up in his Corolla on East Muriel Street. Maybe Ronnie sensed something. Pru has found a dove-colored shot-silk dress with a boxy jacket that makes her hips look not too wide and sends out zigzags of shimmer; the gray goes from silver to a kind of purple when she moves. She has thickened in the waist and jaw and has crow's-feet and tiny creases on her cheeks and even her chin that come and go when she smiles her crooked, dissatisfied smile. Nelson can't remember if her nose was always so hooked, with so sharp a point. The long-limbed, green-eyed beauty he and his father had desired is cobwebbed over with a certain gauze of age and disappointment, yet those who remember can see through it; he thinks she is holding up pretty well. Pru sees Billy as one of the gang who nearly ruined Nelson back in the Laid-Back days and greets him coolly, though in fact Billy was never a big user. Mom in her nervousness and maybe boosted by some tipple before dinner squeals "Billy Fosnacht!" and embraces him almost in tears, blurting, "I loved your dear mother so!"

Roy at fourteen is taller than his grandmother and about the same height as Nelson and Ronnie and Pru and Annabelle, but he will get taller; his growth spurt has years to go. The dark Springer genes have overruled the Angstrom pallor in the boy's hair and brows and the long curved eyelashes, like his father's but without the deep-set wary look. His upper lip is fuzzy and his ears stick out and his eyes are bright and, for an adolescent, calm. He puts his knuckly hand in Annabelle's competent soft one and tells her, "My sister is sorry not to meet you this time. She had a message I was to give you: your father was a doll."

"A doll?" Annabelle smiles.

"A neat guy, I think she meant. He died when she was nine, and she has a lot more memories of him than I do. I remember going to visit him in the hospital once. Also how when there was any candy or nuts around you had to watch out—he'd steal a candy bar right from under your nose, even though he was a grownup."

This is a success; everyone laughs. Roy gives his mother's slightly lopsided grin, and Annabelle says, "Thank you so much, Roy. You've helped make him real to me."

"We'll have to have you over for dinner in the New Year," Ronnie tells her, in a rehearsed voice, not quite looking at her. "I got a ton of Rabbit stories even Janice hasn't heard."

"We have a reservation at the Lookout," Nelson intervenes. To his elders he explains, "That's the fancy new restaurant in the old Pinnacle Hotel. When I called at first they said they were full up. But Billy got us into the first sitting, at seven."

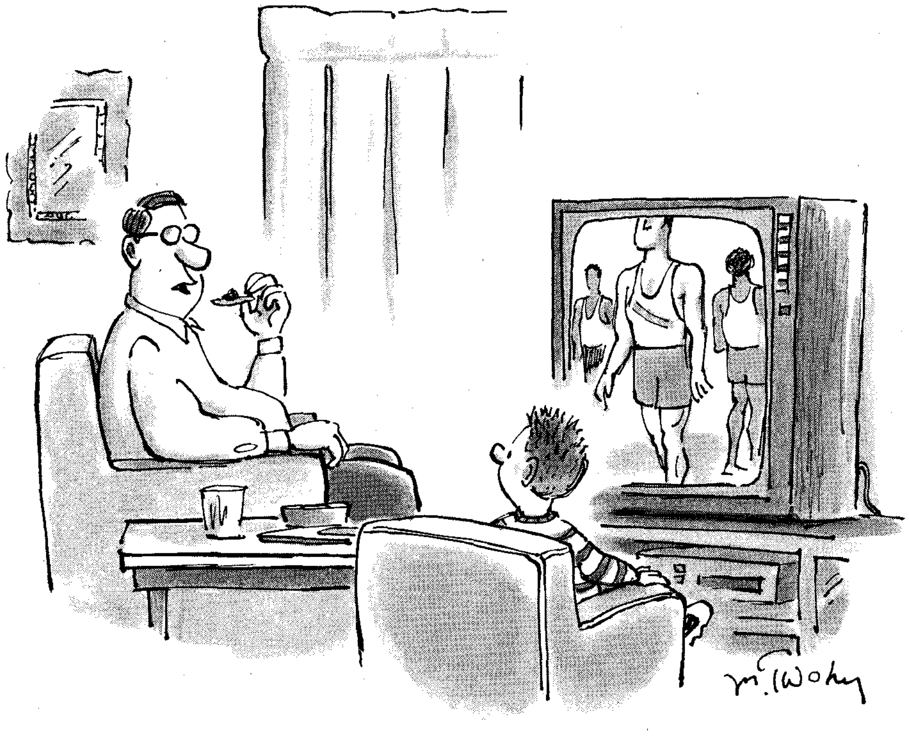
"The maître d's upper-right bicuspid is all mine," Billy explains. "We had to go back in; the first didn't take."

"Oh, how beautiful you all look!" Janice exclaims, as something in the occasion, the sudden clumping here of strands going back deep into time, brims over for her. "Just think," she says, "the next time we see each other, the year will have all those zeros in it! I can't *stand* it!"

"O.K., Mom," Nelson says nervously.

Ronnie says, husbandly-expansive, covering for her tears, pompously proud of them, "Young Bill Gates here and I are going to have a great time making hot dogs and popcorn and watching the boob tube, watching the future roll our way. It's been 2000 for hours in Fiji and Japan—no Y2K problems in Sydney or Tokyo as far as they can tell. Paris was spectacular a half hour ago, and at seven it's going to hit London, Blair and the Queen and their dumb Dome. For most of the world, midnight is already history! Time is relative, as Einstein pointed out. Isn't that right, Roy?"

"Sort of like that," the boy says, embar-



"Daddy is fiscally buff."

rassed by so crudely approximate a truth.

Billy announces, "I keep thinking of all those that didn't quite make it. J.F.K. Junior, Payne Stewart, and the other day the Lone Ranger, poor guy."

"God bless you, Billy!" Janice exclaims, burbling out of some chaotic reserve of sorrow that Nelson, dry-eyed, sees into as into a dark well at whose bottom his own head in silhouette glimmers in a disk of reflected sky. Under the pressure of the momentous calendrical event almost upon them they all kiss, Nelson Roy and Janice Pru and Billy Mrs. Angstrom (as he still thinks of her) and Ronnie Annabelle, who tries to deflect him to a cheek but is nailed on the mouth (the same cushiony lips, he cannot but remember, that Ruth once blew him with, down in a shack on the Jersey shore, salt air making everything sticky, the odors of sex tossed everywhere like their clothes), kiss there by the door, the door with its rasping bell and oval brass knob with the raised pattern burnished by uncountable hands, by uncountable comings and goings in the twentieth century, at 89 Joseph Street.

Hurry, they mustn't be late, the maître d' will give their table away, they scramble in an exclamatory tumble into Nelson's off-white Corolla parked at the curb, as excited as teen-agers to be out. The plan is the meal and then a movie, not one of the four at the tired mall on the way into Brewer, though as they pass it Billy, in the back seat, says wistfully, "I'd love to see 'Galaxy Quest.' One of my hygienists says there's a great sex scene where one of the humans makes out with an extraterrestrial female who turns back into, like, an octopus when she gets excited."

"Nice," says Annabelle, in the back seat with him.

The movie Nelson wants them to see is "American Beauty," cited the year's best by a number of big-city critics, but assailed by several of Pennsylvania's defenders of decency, and now playing at a second-run, cut-price theatre called Instant Classics, out beyond the old fairgrounds. And they do see it, getting back into Nelson's car at twenty past eleven in a state of some coziness after five hours together, sitting through the movie and before that making polite talk at the restaurant, thinking up topics, steering the two men away from childhood reminiscences, the women talking about their career dissatisfactions, each of the four privately scared of the millennial moment, trying to absorb its significance from the air, the tepid snow-free air. The view during the meal, up on Mt. Judge, one table back from the windows but nevertheless grand, displayed on reality's wide screen Brewer's grid, stretching beneath them to the black swerve of the river and the few great holding tanks not yet dismantled and the suburbs receding with an ever dimmer radiance toward lights that show scattered on wooded indigo hills, the lights of Diamond County.

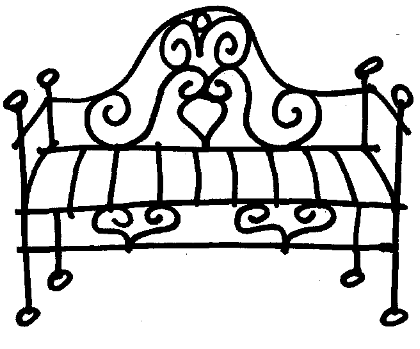
Back in the Corolla, the movie uneasily digesting on top of the dinner wine, Pru says, "Well, I didn't think that was so great. Could you believe that ending? I couldn't. Stars at night from a field, his grandmother's hands—that guy never acted like a man who had ever noticed his grandmother's hands or anything but his own selfish itches and threatened ego."

From the back seat Billy contributes, "It made me feel better about death. Didn't Kevin Spacey look happy, dead?"

"He looked spacy," Nelson says. "He looked like a freeze-frame. That's what death is, a freeze-frame. Hey, where do you want to go now? I've run out of ideas. We have half an hour. There's stuff downtown, I know. They've put a heated tent for a Christian-rock concert in the big hole on Weiser above Sixth, where the housing project has stalled. We could go and mill about."

"Ugh," Billy says.

The parking lot at Instant Classics is tricky to get out of, five rows of cars feeding into one exit lane, and Nelson is never very sure of himself on this side of Brewer. They have put in some new bypass highways and mall access roads that confuse him. He somehow thought they would spontaneously know where to go. Why does everything always fall on him? He says, "I wonder if we could get into the Laid-Back."



Pru says, "That old druggie hangout of yours?"

"It's all clean," Billy pipes up. "It's changed owners, after the last set got busted and put in jail. No drugs now. No smoking of any sort."

"Do I turn right or left up here to get back on 222?" Nelson asks.

"Try right, it's easier," Billy says.

As Nelson follows this directive he hears behind him Annabelle ask in a soft sympathetic searching voice she has never used with him, "Billy, do you think a lot about death?"

"All the time, how did you know?"

"The way you kept flinching in the movie."

"I thought that neurotic kid with the videocam was going to kill somebody, maybe the girl he was spying on."

"Wasn't *she* a hard-hearted horror?" Nelson chimes in. " 'Kill my father. Do it.' " He remembers Michael DiLorenzo confessing that he wanted to kill his parents, and that Michael killed himself, maybe so he wouldn't do it. Nelson tastes the cold iron at the core of even green planets. No fresh start, no life beyond. The headlights are picking up flecks, sparks like mayflies; it can't be snow, so it must be flying dirt.

"I didn't like her," Annabelle announces. "I identified more with the other one, the pretty one who acted like a tramp but then turned out to be a virgin."

"And the whole gay business made me upset," says Billy.

"I thought it was very overdone and unconvincing," Pru states, her profile almost haggard in the strokes of oncoming headlights, as the tangled traffic burns above asphalt hard to see, the arrows and lines obscure.

"Boy," Billy rattles on, "they sure gave you enough blood on the wall when he got shot."

Annabelle chimes in, "I loved the routine the cheerleaders did with the bowler hats."

"Pure Fosse," says Billy. "I was afraid somebody's house was going to get burned down, either the hero's or the military man's next to it."

"It was a picture, really, when you think about it," Pru persists, "of cheap shots at everybody. Advertising, the military, blah blah. Oh, come *on*."

"That was so nice," Annabelle continues on her track, "when she is willing but he doesn't sleep with her and makes her a hamburger instead." Nelson has never heard her voice like this, free-associating and childishly trusting. Maybe this evening isn't such a failure as it felt. He has the persistent sensation that there is one more person in the car than the four of them.

"Hey, Nelson," Billy's voice whines from the back seat. "Aren't you on this road the wrong way?"

He had been wondering why the traffic was so thin. They have become the only car on the highway, speeding between dark slopes of farmland and distant Christmas lights.

"You're heading toward Maiden Springs!" Billy tells him. "Brewer is behind us!"

"Son of a fucking bitch," Nelson says. "I asked for directions coming out of the parking lot and nobody helped."

"Nelson, you've lived here all your life," Pru points out.

"Yeah, but not around the fairgrounds. I hate this area. The fair always depressed me, the way school made us go every September."

"Me, too," Billy says. "I was terrified of the freaks. And the rides used to do a job on my stomach. I remember once with Betty Majka in one of those that roll you around opposite each other being afraid I was going to throw up in her face."

"Take the next exit," Pru says, in a low, sharply aimed wife's voice. "Go left at the overpass and then right to get you back on the highway going the other way."

"*I* know how to reverse direction," Nelson snaps at her.

"And the animals in cages," Billy goes on. "I have a nightmare about being in a cage that gets smaller and smaller, like an egg slicer."

"You poor dear worried thing," Annabelle says silkily.

Pru says to Annabelle, as Nelson angrily whips the car up and around the exit ramp, "I think that was unrealistic, too. Most men would have just screwed her anyway. I mean, he'd been dreaming about almost nothing else."

But it is hard for her to break into the cocoon of mutual narcissistic regard being woven in the back seat. From the little overpass road, dark farmland seems to stretch in every direction, broken only by a Gulf station, its towering oval sign aglow, halfway to the hills. Nelson asks the back seat, "What do you think, Annabelle? How far would the older man have gone? The father figure?"

Her gentle voice arrives: "Nelson, what are you asking?"

"How far did your stepfather go with you? Mr. Byer. My gut tells me," he says, recklessly wheeling through the entrance ramp and heading down the highway toward where Brewer's dome of light stains the sky, "he went pretty far. That's why you're always saying what a great guy he was. He wasn't. He was into touchy-feely. A good thing he died when you were sixteen, it might have got a lot worse."

"*Ba*by," Pru says, but there is no stopping him, now that he and the Corolla are headed in the right direction. He needs to undress his sister, in front of Billy.

"And your mother was no help, was she? She was a savvy old tramp, she must have guessed. She'd been through the mill, why not you, huh?"

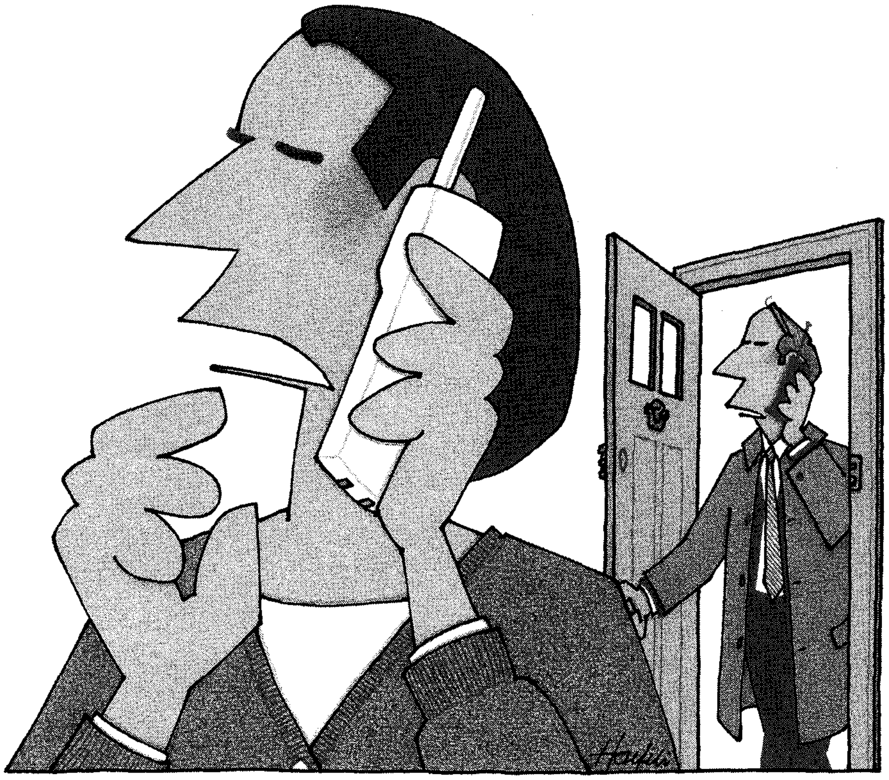
"That's not true!" Annabelle cries. "She never knew anything! And he never—what's the word?—"

"Penetrated," Nelson offers.

"Exactly!" she says. "He just groped, all in the name of parental affection, of course." This bit of sarcasm pries her open; she makes a strange shuddering prolonged sound of upheaved regret, then pours out, sobs making her gasp, "I didn't dare ask him to stop, he'd handled me since I was a baby, it didn't seem right, yet how could it be very wrong? It was as if he couldn't help it, he was, like, sleepwalking. He'd tuck me in afterwards."

"He knew what you didn't know," Nelson points out. "That he wasn't your real father. And your mother knew it too."

"She had no idea what he was doing, I'm positive. But it was so much a relief when he died that I blamed myself. It had got to be a secret between us, as if I wanted it too, when I *hated* it!" Her tears are coming freely now, pent-up, accus-



"I have to hang up now. You just walked through the door."

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SCHEDULE

Primary (1960)
This classic political documentary chronicles the heated 1960 Wisconsin Democratic primary between John F. Kennedy and Hubert Humphrey.
Oct. 10 at 1 PM; Oct. 11 at 10 PM

A Perfect Candidate (1996)
Entertaining documentary about Oliver North's unsuccessful 1994 bid for a US Senate seat.
Oct. 10 at 2:20 PM; Oct. 13 at 9:35 PM

A Lion Is in the Streets (1953)
James Cagney, in a Huey Long take-off, as a swamp peddler turned politician.
Oct. 11 at 2 and 6 PM

All the King's Men (1949)
A brilliant adaptation of Robert Penn Warren's Pulitzer Prize–winning novel about the rise and fall of a Huey Long–like senator.
Oct. 11 at 3:50 and 7:50 PM

The Confession (1970)
Based on a classic Stalinist show trial, The Confession tells the story of Czech Communist Arthur London and his unjustified 1951 purge trial for treason.
Oct. 12 at 1 PM; Oct. 14 at 8:30 PM

Secret Honor (1984)
Philip Baker Hall's Richard Nixon paces about his study in near-psychotic rage against his perceived enemies. Adapted by Robert Altman from the one-man stage show.
Oct. 12 at 3:45 and 7:35 PM

Point of Order (1964)
Compiled from TV footage, this documentary chronicles the 36-day hearings of Joseph McCarthy's 1954 Communist witch hunt.
Oct. 12 at 5:40 and 9:30 PM

Salt of the Earth (1954)
A taut drama-documentary about striking New Mexico mine workers that earned the film's producer, director, screenwriter, and star a spot on the Hollywood blacklist.
Oct. 13 at 1 and 5:20 PM

My Son John (1952)
Archetypal apple-pie parents (Helen Hayes, Dean Jagger) suspect their son (Robert Walker) of Communist leanings.
Oct. 13 at 3 and 7:15 PM

Join us for the US premiere of two provocative films produced by FABRICA, the creative arts laboratory funded by Benetton.

Moloch (1999, FABRICA)
An ironic and eerie portrait of Hitler, Eva Braun, and company during a weekend at Berchtesgaden.
Oct. 14 at 4:30 PM

Seventeen Years (1999, FABRICA)
This Zhang Yuan film tells the tale of a woman who reunites with her family after a 17-year sentence for murder.
Oct. 14 at 6:40 PM

The Battle of Chile (1977)
Patricio Guzmán's epic three-part chronicle of Chile's peaceful socialist revolution and violent counter-revolution.
Oct. 15 at 4:30 PM

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ENTRY AND PRAYER

When you get tired of reading
all the beautiful words
by lousy human beings, and come to

the end of your patience with the voluminous
indeed inexhaustible
mediocrities of goodness,

what to do? I suggest—
I don't know.
Let him think.

And if there are no words

to this place give him back
the illiterate sleep: no need
the Haldol needle night-night;

let him go quietly, not
in horror,
not in glory.

—*Franz Wright*

---

ing. Nelson squints into the high headlights, trucks and those fucking S.U.V.s, that afflict his eyes from behind and ahead. The traffic is hurrying in both directions toward some disaster, the end of time as they've known it. Annabelle goes the next step, crying, "I felt I'd killed him! Good for me!" Her round face flashes in his rearview mirror, one teary eye meeting his.

"Right," Nelson says calmly. "It really screwed you up with men since, didn't it? How come, do you think, you've never married?"

"Oh *stop* it!" she protests. "Why do you want me *mar*ried, why do you *care*?" She sinks back, sobbing now with a muffled, burbling quality that suggests Billy is comforting her. Nelson can't risk turning his head to look into the back seat; his sensation of a fifth person in the automobile is so strong he needs to strengthen his grip on the steering wheel.

Billy says, "Great going, Nelson. So that's psychotherapy."

"It helps to get things in the open," he sulkily says. "Then you go from there." He stares ahead. He has always disliked this flat side of Brewer, as opposed to the tilting Mt. Judge side. Serve-yourself gas stations with ranks of pumps, fast-food franchises with plastic mini-playgrounds for obese toddlers, dismal six-store strip malls, carpet-and-linoleum outlets, vegetable stands boarded up for the winter, cutesy Amish cutouts beckoning ignorant tourists from the ghettos to "Real Pa. Dutch Cuisine." He knows where he is now.

Pru says, twisting her head to talk to Annabelle, "So you got pawed. So did I. My father was a crumb-bum, when you think about it. It's not the end of the world." She is tough. Her nose looks sharp as a witch's in profile but Nelson senses her bulk, her body in the shimmery silk dress and rust-brown overcoat, as radiating warmth. Her long hands lie idle in her shadowy lap. He reaches down to adjust the car heat, and his own hand and Pru's knees show similarly pale in the dash-light glow.

In the back seat, his sister is sniffling and Billy is saying, "Easy, easy. We're talking ancient history."

The road has stoplights now, and up ahead somebody, a car dealer or club owner, has gone to the expense of renting a bank of spotlights; three of them stir the sky to the limits of the local haze.

"We are passing," Nelson announces in a tour guide's droning tone, "the former site of Springer Motors Toyota Agency, now derelict."

Mom sold the acreage and the building to a computer-components company that never took off; a sudden turn in technology left it behind. The spotlights are a little further down Route 111, in front of what was once a Planters Peanuts store and became, added on to, a disco in the seventies. The tall thin silhouette of Mr. Peanut outside, a twelve-foot billboard, became a nearly nude dancing girl with her naughty parts covered by bubbles, but that was too sexist to last. Now the humanoid shape holds a cowgirl in short white skirt and high white boots advertising "Pure Country Music." Country music keeps coming back. Or is it just slow to go away? The parking lot looks only half full. People with sense are staying home tonight, petrified of fanatic Arabs sneaking in from Canada.

"Hey, Nellie," Billy pipes up. "It's getting close to midnight, and we're nowhere."

"I know, I'm going as fast as I can. If you hadn't got me lost—"

"Did Nelson ever tell you the story," Pru asks Annabelle, "how he lost the agency up his nose?"

"No, not really." Her voice sounds dried out, for now.

"Say, thanks a lot," Nelson complains to his wife.

"Siblings should have no secrets," Pru says, and makes, he knows without looking, that prudish little mouth of hers, as if sucking on something tart. "Nelson wasn't always such a saint."

"He was a terrible pill, in fact," Billy contributes, making the fun rougher. "A real little mamma's boy, terrified of his father, who was a pretty nice guy, actually."

"Unlike yours," Nelson tells him. "What a sleazebag."

"Very musical, though," Billy tells Annabelle. "He could play anything, any instrument, by ear."

"Oh, I've always wanted to be able to do that!" she responds, snuggling from the way her voice squeezes down. Does Nelson imagine it, or is there the purr of a zipper being unzipped, that long diagonal zipper on the front of her dress? His sister giggles, and a hand, from the sound of it, is lightly slapped.

Nelson drives through West Brewer. Those new-style icicle lights, like aprons of luminous pearls, hang from the little porches of the row houses slanting down to the river and the Weiser Street Bridge. Then there unrolls beneath the wheels of the car Brewer's main drag in all its Yuletide glory; the trees rimming Weiser Square are looped with necklaces of white lights, scribbles in three dimensions. They pass Fourth Street, and the bronze statue of Conrad Weiser in Mohawk headdress in the center of the traffic circle at Fifth Street. Trolley cars used to go east, west, north, and south from this point, to amusement parks and picnic groves. The human traffic thickens; the city fathers have laid on a Millennium Ball in the atrium of the glass-enclosed mall between Fifth and Sixth on the left side of the street, as well as the Christian-rock concert a block up on the right, in the great hole. A dim din penetrates the Corolla windows.

"Hey, Nelson," Billy says. "The Sunflower Beer clock says it's midnight! The millennium is happening and we're all stuck in this little Jap jalopy! Nothing's moving!"

"Don't panic," Nelson tells him. "That clock never told the right time. The Laid-Back is only up at Ninth, we'll be there in a minute."

Then Nelson sees the dire occur: at the intersection of Sixth and Weiser, where Kroll's Department Store used to be, two cars ahead of them, the traffic light goes out. Hanging high above the asphalt, the light was green and now is dead. Not red, dead. The slow traffic stops. Revellers, mostly Hispanic kids in jeans and windbreakers, dart among the cars. A shout is going up, but here and there, as if nobody knows exactly what is happening. Some cars honk, in celebration or exasperation. The street lights flicker and go out.

"Oh, my God," Annabelle says, "terrorists just like they said," and begins to cry again.

"It's a little glitch," Billy says, feigning calm, though this must feel like a tunnel to him. "These lights are all on computers."

"Son of a bitch!" Nelson says. Decades of wrongs, hurts, unjust deaths press behind his eyes. He pushes down on the window locks. Hooded kids with sparkle dust on their faces are crowding around the Corolla and looking up the street toward Mt. Judge. The city's fire alarms begin to wail; church bells are dully ringing. At the top of Mt. Judge, fireworks are ignited, one slow bloom after another, mingled with staccato gashes, potassium white and barium green, sodium yellow and chlorine blue, dying, blossoming, dying in drifts of dismissed sparks as the dull concussions thud through the windshield. "We're missing it!" he cries.

The Corolla was the third car from the intersection when the traffic light went out. The first car glided through, unaware of the breakdown, and the next waited for the car on the right to come out and cut across. Sixth is one-way here, so there is no traffic from the left. The cars behind are honking in their confusion, but up this close to the intersection the problem and its solution are plain: take your turn, in democratic American style. The car ahead of Nelson, a little cherry-red specimen of the remodelled VW Beetle, cute as a bug, with oval slant tail-lights like Disney animal eyes, creeps out and through, and the car on the right, a serious, four-ring, square-cut tan Audi, takes its turn like a good citizen. Then it is Nelson's turn, his old white Toyota's turn, to pass through the doused light and continue on, up Weiser toward the mountain and its fireworks, past where Kroll's used to be, and on across Seventh, where mile-long trains of coal would drag through from Pottsville to Philly once upon a time, and on up to look for a parking space within a walk of the Laid-Back. It will be jolly, to walk, the four of them, out in the air. He has an image of a frozen Daiquiri, or should it be a margarita, with salt all around the rim?

"Hey!" he exclaims. Tailgating the Audi, a black-and-silver Ford Expedition, a huge S.U.V. with truck wheels and a side mirror the size of a human head, keeps coming, trying to barrel through out of turn, against all decency and order. Some brat of the local rich, beered-up and baseball-hatted, with his smirking airhead buddies, gives Nelson a glazed so-what stare. Nelson sees red. "That fucker," he says. Pru shrieks when she realizes that Nelson's foot is firm on the accelerator and that nothing short of ramming into the Expedition will stop their forward motion. Its fat high bumper—two-tone, the lower half chrome—reflects their right headlight in a flaring smear; she braces for the bump, the crazed windshield, the crumpled metal, the thud of pain. But the cocky brat in the baseball cap sees with widened eyes that Nelson isn't kidding. He brakes hard, so his buddies' empty heads all bounce; the Corolla skims by, still accelerating, missing by an inch. The dig-out smell of hot rubber fills the interior. The couple in the back seat cheer, a bit breathlessly. "I *hate* S.U.V.s," Nelson explains. "Pretentious gas guzzlers, they think they own the road."

High in the tinted windshield, so that it looks greenish, a ball of twinkling fire expands. The Christian rock music thumps away in the vast illumined excavation on their right. Nelson shivers, as if a contentious spirit is leaving him. And now Pru is trying to hug him, her nose poking into his cheek, her breath fluttering warm on his neck. "Oh, honey, that was *great*, the way you made that asshole chicken out. I think I wet my pants."

"Me, too, almost," says Annabelle.

"It's funny about death," Billy contributes. "When you actually face it, it's kind of a rush."

To Nelson Pru says, so softly the others could hear only if they were to listen hard, "Let's not hang around too long at the Laid-Back. I thought I might stay at your place tonight."

"Hi? Annabelle? It's—"

"Nelson! *How* is it going?"

"Not bad. Good, actually. Her apartment is pretty roomy, though eventually we might look for a house. Roy would like a house in Stow."

"He must be thrilled."

"Thrills at that age wear off in about half an hour, but yeah, he seems pleased.

And Judy is pleased. She says boyfriends take you much more seriously if you have a father on the premises. She's broken up, thank God, with that creep who kept her in Ohio to go to some very stuffy party, as she described it. She wishes she'd come to Brewer."

"And Pru?"

"Good news. She saw this ad for 'Human Resources Assistant' for one of the big banks down on Market Street saying 'people-oriented individual' and they liked her; she's one of three they've narrowed it down to. Her experience wasn't quite what they want, but I guess this guy Gekopoulos wrote her a raving recommendation."

"I meant *you* and Pru."

"Oh. That's O.K. You've met her, you know what she's like. She isn't one to make a big show of her feelings, usually. She says having a man in the apartment is as bad as having two untrained dogs. She should talk, we're surrounded by her relatives out here, they keep calling up and dropping around."

"You certainly are more talkative, now you're back with her."

"It's *you* I like to talk to. Too much, huh?"

"Oh, no. But why do you call her Pru? Your mother calls her Teresa."

"How'd you know that?"

"She called, to invite me to dinner. Just her and Ronnie. And Billy if I wished."

"Billy. That goon. I'm sorry I saddled you with him that night. He got me lost, in my own county, and then stuck in traffic at the greatest moment in history."

"Yes, it was terrible the way he did that. He cries about it in his sleep."

A pause, while Nelson wonders how much he's supposed to make of this disclosure. "About Teresa," he says. "That's her name, but in high school everybody thought she was prudish, and there was another Terry in the class. You're right, though, it's nice to be back with her. I love her, I guess."

"Of course you do."

"I've begun to check around, for jobs in mental health. Akron's a lot like Brewer except it's three times as big. A river, and row houses, and no shortage of misery. I was thinking of looking for something in a drug-rehab place. Addicts may freeze to death, but they don't do suicide."

"That was too bad. I could tell how upset you were."

"I wasn't that upset. Esther told me not to take it egotistically. She asked me when I gave notice if that was the reason. I said I hoped not." He asks, "How's the weather in Diamond County?"

"*Cold.* Winter! Inches of snow, and some more tonight. We all thought it couldn't do winter anymore, because of global warming."

"I know. Here, too. The same weather, basically the same everything. But I like it. I like seeing different license plates."

"Your mother said she and Ronnie are going down to the Florida condo and thinking of selling the house and moving there for good. They both have aches and pains warm weather might help."

"For *years* I've told her to sell. But listen. If you do go to Mom's for dinner, take Billy or somebody with you, for protection from Ron. You're too—"

She waits.

"Delicious. Sweet. Untouched, somehow," he finds himself saying.

"Nelson."

"Yes?"

"I *have* been seeing Billy."

"Surprise, surprise."

"You're teasing, aren't you, when you call him a goon?"

"Well, he was a *boy* goon. Anyway, in this country even goons have their rights."

"I think he's darling."

"In what way?"

"He thinks I'm wonderful. After those horrible things you got me to admit in the car at least I don't have anything to hide from him. He says when he's with me his anxieties go away."

"Well, is that a good reason—?"

"Nelson, *no* reason is perfect. But then neither are we."

"O.K., I'll buy that." Happiness for her is already rising in him, like water trembling upward.

"Now I have a serious question. Don't be flip, it matters to me. Ever since I was a little girl I've thought if I ever got married it would be in a church, with all the formality." Annabelle asks, "If Billy and I get married, will you give me away?"

Says Nelson, "Gladly." ♦

(This is the second part of a two-part story.)

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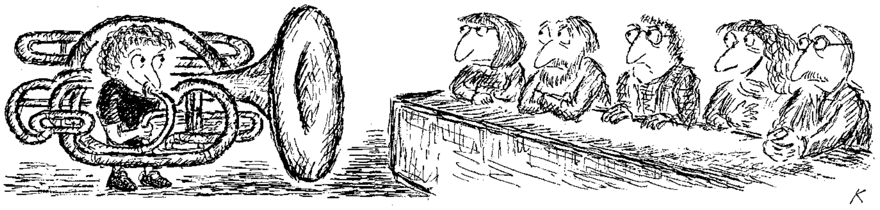


A CRITIC AT LARGE

RE-READING SAUL BELLOW

A novelist's notes on half a century's achievement.

BY PHILIP ROTH

"THE ADVENTURES OF AUGIE MARCH" (1953)

The transformation of the novelist who published "Dangling Man" in 1944 and "The Victim" in 1947 into the novelist who published "The Adventures of Augie March" in '53 is revolutionary. Bellow overthrows everything: compositional choices grounded in narrative principles of harmony and order, a novelistic ethos indebted to Kafka's "The Trial" and Dostoyevsky's "The Double" and "The Eternal Husband," as well as a moral perspective that can hardly be said to derive from delight in the flash, color, and plenty of existence. In "Augie March," a very grand, assertive, freewheeling conception of both the novel and the world the novel represents breaks loose from all sorts of self-imposed strictures, the beginner's principles of composition are subverted, and, like the character of Five Properties in "Augie March," the writer is himself "hipped on superabundance." The pervasive threat that organized the outlook of the hero and the action of the novel in "The Victim" and "Dangling Man" disappears, and the bottled-up aggression that was "The Victim" 's Asa Leventhal and the obstructed will that was Joseph in "Dangling Man" emerge as voracious appetite. There is the narcissistic enthusiasm for life in all its hybrid forms propelling Augie March, and there is an inexhaustible passion for a teemingness of dazzling specifics driving Saul Bellow.

The scale dramatically enlarges: the world inflates, and those inhabiting it, monumental, overwhelming, ambitious, energetic people, do not easily, in Augie's words, get "stamped out in the life struggle." The intricate landscape of physical being and the power-seeking of influential personalities make "character" in all its manifestations—particularly its ability indelibly to imprint its presence—less an aspect of the novel than its preoccupation.

Think of Einhorn at the whorehouse, Thea with the eagle, Dingbat and his fighter, Simon coarsely splendid at the Magnuses and violent at the lumberyard. From Chicago to Mexico and the mid-Atlantic and back, it's all Brobdingnag to Augie, observed, however, not by a caustic, angry Swift but by a word-painting Hieronymus Bosch, an American Bosch, an unsermonizing and optimistic Bosch, who detects even in the eeliest slipperiness of his creatures, in their most colossal finagling and conspiring and deceit, what is humanly enrapturing. The intrigues of mankind no longer incite paranoid fear in the Bellow hero but light him up. That the richly rendered surface is manifold with contradiction and ambiguity ceases to be a source of conster-

Bellow in Chicago in 1976. He was Columbus for the grandchildren of immigrants who set out as American writers after him. Photograph by Jeff Lowenthal.

WOODFIN CAMP

nation; instead, the "mixed character" of everything is bracing. Manifoldness is fun.

Engorged sentences had existed before in American fiction—notably in Melville and Faulkner—but not quite like those in "Augie March," which strike me as more than liberty-taking; when mere liberty-taking is driving a writer, it can easily lead to the empty flamboyance of some of "Augie March" 's imitators. I read Bellow's liberty-taking prose as the syntactical manifestation of Augie's large, robust ego, that attentive ego roving and evolving, always in motion, alternately mastered by the force of others and escaping from it. There are sentences in the book whose effervescence, whose undercurrent of buoyancy leave one with the sense of so much going on, a theatrical, exhibitionistic, ardent prose tangle that lets in the dynamism of living without driving mentalness out. This voice no longer encountering resistance is permeated by mind while connected also to the mysteries of feeling. It's a voice unbridled and intelligent both, going at full force and yet always sharp enough to sensibly size things up.

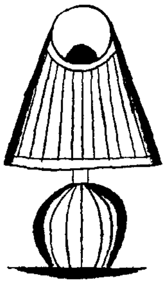
Chapter XVI of "Augie March" is about the attempt, by Thea Fenchel, Augie's headstrong beloved, to train her eagle, Caligula, to attack and capture the large lizards crawling around the mountains outside Acatla, in central Mexico, to make that "menace falling fast from the sky" fit into her scheme of things. It's a chapter of prodigious strength, sixteen bold pages about a distinctly human happening whose mythic aura (and comedy, too) is comparable to the great scenes in Faulkner—in "The Bear," in "Spotted Horses," in "As I Lay Dying," throughout "The Wild Palms"—where human resolve pits itself against the natural wildness. The combat between Caligula and Thea (for the eagle's body and soul), the wonderfully precise passages describing the eagle soaring off to satisfy his beautiful fiendish trainer and miserably failing her, crystallize a notion about the will to power and dominance that is central to nearly every one of Augie's adventures. "To tell the truth," Augie says near the end of the book, "I'm good and tired of all these big personalities, destiny molders, and heavy-water brains, Machiavellis and wizard evildoers, big-wheels and imposers-upon, absolutists."

On the book's memorable first page, in the second sentence, Augie quotes Heraclitus: a man's character is his fate. But doesn't "The Adventures of Augie March" suggest exactly the opposite, that a man's fate (at least this man's, this Chicago-born Augie's) is the impinging character of others?

Bellow once told me that "somewhere in my Jewish and immigrant blood there were conspicuous traces of doubt as to whether I had the right to practice the writer's trade." He suggested that, at least in part, this doubt permeated his blood because "our own Wasp establishment, represented mainly by Harvard-trained professors," considered a son of immigrant Jews unfit to write books in English. These guys infuriated him.

It may well have been the precious gift of an appropriate fury that launched him into beginning his third book not with the words "I am a Jew, the son of immigrants" but, rather, by warranting that son of immigrant Jews who is Augie March to break the ice with the Harvard-trained professors (as well as everyone else) by flatly decreeing, without apology or hyphenation, "I am an American, Chicago born."

Opening "Augie March" with those six words demonstrates the same sort of assertive gusto that the *musical* sons of immigrant Jews—Irving Berlin, Aaron Copland, George Gershwin, Ira Gershwin, Richard Rodgers, Lorenz Hart, Jerome Kern, Leonard Bernstein—brought to America's radios, theatres, and concert halls by staking their claim to America (as subject, as inspiration, as audience) in songs like "God Bless America," "This Is the Army, Mr. Jones," "Oh, How I Hate to Get Up in the Morning," "Manhattan," and "Ol' Man River"; in musical plays like "Oklahoma!," "West Side Story," "Porgy and Bess," "On the Town," "Show Boat," and "Of Thee I Sing"; in ballet music like "Appalachian Spring," "Rodeo," and "Billy the Kid." Back in the teens, when the immigration was still going on, back in the twenties, the thirties, the forties, even into the fifties, none of these American-raised boys whose parents or grandparents had spoken Yiddish had the slightest interest in writing shtetl kitsch such as came along in the sixties with "Fiddler on the Roof." Having themselves been freed by their families' emigration from the pious orthodoxy and the social authoritarianism that were such a great source of shtetl claustrophobia, why would they want to? In secular, democratic, unclaustrophobic America, Augie will, as he says, "go at things as I have taught myself, free-style."



This assertion of unequivocal, unquellable citizenship in free-style America (and the five-hundred-odd-page book that followed) was precisely the bold stroke required to abolish anyone's doubts about the American writing credentials of an immigrant son like Saul Bellow. Augie, at the very end of his book, exuberantly cries out, "Look at me, going everywhere! Why, I am a sort of Columbus of those near-at-hand." Going where his pedigreed betters wouldn't have believed he had any right to go with the American language, Bellow was indeed Columbus for people like me, the grandchildren of immigrants, who set out as American writers after him.

"SEIZE THE DAY" (1956)

Three years after "The Adventures of Augie March" appeared, Bellow published "Seize the Day," a short novel that is the fictional antithesis of "Augie March." In form spare and compact and tightly organized, it is a sorrow-filled book, set in a hotel for the aged on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, a book populated largely by people old, sick, and dying, while "Augie March" is a vast, sprawling, loquacious book, spilling over with everything, including authorial high spirits, and set wherever life's fullness can be rapturously perceived. "Seize the Day" depicts the culmination, in a single day, of the breakdown of a man who is the opposite of Augie March in every important way. Where Augie is the opportunity seizer, a fatherless slum kid eminently adoptable, Tommy Wilhelm is the mistake maker with a prosperous old father who is very much present but who wants nothing to do with him and his problems. Inasmuch as Tommy's father is characterized in the book, it is through his relentless distaste for his son. Tommy is brutally disowned, eminently unadoptable, largely because he is bereft of the lavish endowment of self-belief, verve, and vibrant adventurousness that is Augie's charm. Where Augie's is an ego triumphantly buoyed up and swept along by the strong currents of life, Tommy's is an ego quashed beneath its burden—Tommy is "assigned to be the carrier of a load which was his own self, his characteristic self." The ego roar amplified by "Augie March" 's prose exuberance Augie joyously articulates on the book's final page: "Look at me, going everywhere!" *Look at me*—the vigorous, child's demand for attention, the cry of exhibitionistic confidence.

The cry resounding through "Seize the Day" is *Help me*. In vain Tommy utters, Help me, help me, I'm getting nowhere, and not only to his own father, Dr. Adler, but to all the false, rogue fathers who succeed Dr. Adler and to whom Tommy foolishly entrusts either his hope, his money, or both. Augie is adopted left and right, people rush to support him and dress him, to educate and transform him. Augie's need is to accumulate vivid and flamboyant patron-admirers while Tommy's pathos is to amass mistakes: "Maybe the making of mistakes expressed the very purpose of his life and the essence of his being here." Tommy, at forty-four, searches desperately for a parent, any parent, to rescue him from imminent destruction, while Augie is already a larkily independent escape artist at twenty-two.

Speaking of his own past, Bellow once said, "It has been a lifelong pattern with me to come back to strength from a position of extreme weakness." Does his history of oscillation from the abyss to the peak and back again find a literary analogue in the thoroughly dialectical relationship of these two consecutive books of the nineteen-fifties? Was the claustrophobic chronicle of failure that is "Seize the Day" undertaken as a grim corrective to the fervor informing its irrepressible predecessor, as the antidote to "Augie March" 's manic openness? By writing "Seize the Day," Bellow seems to have been harking back (if not deliberately, perhaps just reflexively) to the ethos of "The Victim," to a dour pre-Augie world where the hero under scrutiny is threatened by enemies, overwhelmed by uncertainty, stalled by confusion, held in check by grievance.

"HENDERSON THE RAIN KING" (1959)

Only six years after "Augie," and there he is again, breaking loose. But whereas with "Augie" he jettisons the conventions of his first two, "proper" books, with "Henderson the Rain King" he delivers himself from "Augie," a book in no way proper. The exotic locale, the volcanic hero, the comic calamity that is his life, the inner turmoil of perpetual yearning, the magical craving quest, the mythical (Reichian?) regeneration through the great wet gush of the blocked-up stuff—all brand-new.

To yoke together two mighty dissimilar endeavors: Bellow's Africa operates for Henderson as Kafka's castle village does for K., affording the perfect unknown testing ground for the alien hero to actualize the deepest, most ineradicable of his needs—to burst his "spirit's sleep," if he can, through the intensity of useful labor. "I want," that objectless, elemental cri de cœur, could as easily have been K.'s as Eugene Henderson' s. There all similarity ends, to be sure. Unlike the Kafkean man endlessly obstructed from achieving his desire, Henderson is the undirected human force whose raging insistence miraculously *does* get through. K. is an initial, with the biographylessness that that implies—and the pathos—while Henderson's burden is a biography that weighs a ton. A boozer, a giant, a Gentile, a middle-aged multimillionaire in a state of continual emotional upheaval, Henderson is hemmed in by the disorderly chaos of "my parents, my wives, my girls, my children, my farm, my animals, my habits, my money, my music lessons, my drunkenness, my prejudices, my brutality, my teeth, my face, my soul!" Because of all his deformities and mistakes, Henderson, in his own thinking, is as

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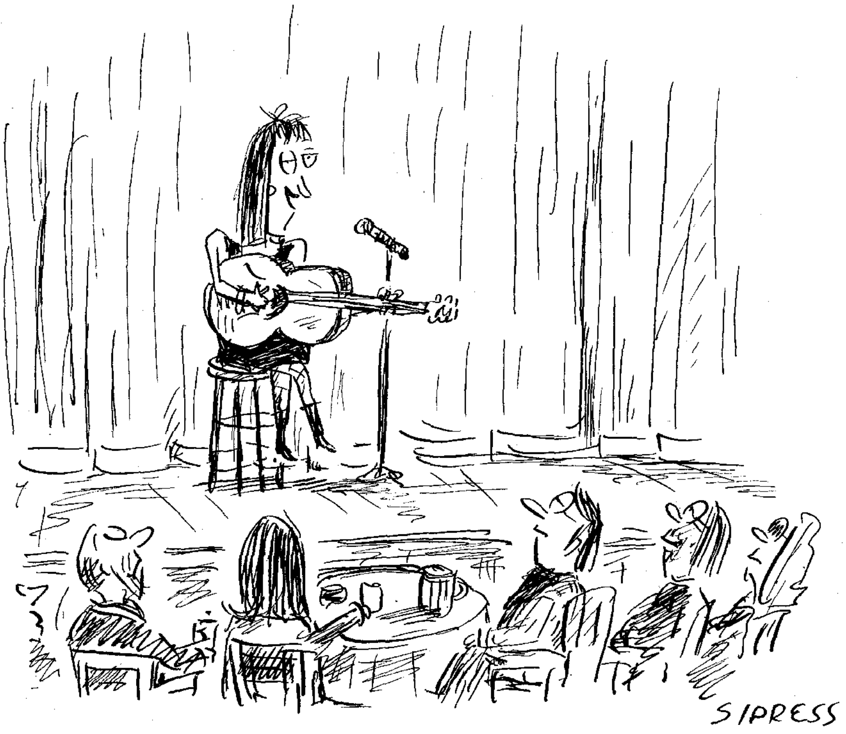

"This next one is a sad little blues tune about love and pain that I wrote before I started taking Celexa."

• •

much a disease as he is a man. He takes leave of home (rather like the author who is imagining him) for a continent peopled by tribal blacks who turn out to be his very cure. Africa as medicine. Henderson the Remedy Maker.

Brilliantly funny, all new, a second enormous emancipation, a book that wants to be serious and unserious at the same time (and is), a book that invites an academic reading while ridiculing such a reading and sending it up, a stunt of a book, but a sincere stunt—a screwball book, but not without great screwball authority.

"HERZOG" (1964)

The character of Moses Herzog, that labyrinth of contradiction and self-division—the wild man and the earnest person with a "Biblical sense of personal experience" and an innocence as phenomenal as his sophistication, intense yet passive, reflective yet impulsive, sane yet insane, emotional, complicated, an expert on pain vibrant with feeling and yet disarmingly simple, a clown in his vengeance and rage, a fool in whom hatred breeds comedy, a sage and knowing scholar in a treacherous world, yet still adrift in the great pool of childhood love, trust, and excitement in things (and hopelessly attached to this condition), an aging lover of enormous vanity and narcissism with a lovingly harsh attitude toward himself, whirling in the wash cycle of a rather generous self-awareness while at the same time aesthetically attracted to anyone vivid, overpoweringly drawn to bullies and bosses, to theatrical know-it-alls, lured by their seeming certainty and by the raw authority of their unambiguity, feeding on their intensity until he's all but crushed by it—this Herzog is Bellow's grandest creation, American literature's Leopold Bloom, except with a difference: in "Ulysses," the encyclopedic mind of the author is transmuted into the linguistic flesh of the novel, and Joyce never cedes to Bloom his own great erudition, intellect, and breadth of rhetoric, whereas in "Herzog" Bellow endows his hero with all of that, not only with a state of mind and a cast of mind but with a mind that *is* a mind.

It's a mind rich and wide-ranging but turbulent with troubles, bursting, swarming with grievance and indignation, a bewildered mind that, in the first sentence of the book, openly, with good reason, questions its equilibrium, and not in highbrowese but in the classic vernacular formulation: "If I am out of my mind." This mind, so forceful, so tenacious, overstocked with the best that has been thought and said, a mind elegantly turning out the most informed generalizations about a lot of the world and its history, happens also to suspect its most fundamental power, the very capacity for comprehension.

The fulcrum on which the drama of the book's adulterous triangle turns, the scene that sends Herzog racing off to Chicago to pick up a loaded pistol to kill Madeleine and Gersbach and instead initiates his final undoing, takes place in a New York courtroom, where Herzog, loitering while waiting for his lawyer to show up, comes upon the nightmare-parody version of his own suffering. It is the trial of a hapless, degraded mother who, with her degenerate lover, has murdered her own little child. So overcome with horror is Herzog at what he sees and hears that he is prompted to cry out to himself, "I fail to understand!"—familiar-enough everyday words, but for Herzog a humbling, pain-ridden, reverberating admission that dramatically connects the intricate wickerwork of his mental existence to the tormenting grid of error and disappointment that is his personal life. Since for Herzog understanding is an impediment to instinctive force, it is when understanding fails him that he reaches for a gun (the very one with which his own father once clumsily threatened to kill *him*)—though, in the end, being Herzog, he cannot fire it. Being Herzog (and his angry father's angry son), he finds firing the pistol "nothing but a thought."

But if Herzog fails to understand, who then does understand, and what is all this thinking *for*? Why is all this uninhibited reflection in Bellow's books in the first place? I don't mean the uninhibited reflection of characters like Tamkin in "Seize the Day," or even King Dahfu in "Henderson," who seem to dish out their spoof-wisdom as much for Bellow to have the fun of inventing it as to create a second realm of confusion in the minds of heroes already plenty confused on their own. I'm referring, rather, to the nearly impossible undertaking that marks Bellow's work as strongly as it does the novels of Robert Musil and Thomas

Mann: the struggle not only to infuse fiction with mind but to make mentalness itself central to the hero's dilemma—to think, in books like "Herzog," about the *problem* of thinking.

Now, Bellow's special appeal, and not just to me, is that in his characteristically American way he has managed brilliantly to close the gap between Thomas Mann and Damon Runyon, but that doesn't minimize the scope of what, beginning with "Augie March," he so ambitiously set out to do: to bring into play (into *free* play) the intellectual faculties that, in writers like Mann, Musil, and him, are no less engaged by the spectacle of life than by the mind's imaginative component, to make rumination congruent with what is represented, to hoist the author's thinking up from the depths to the narrative's surface without sinking the narrative's mimetic power, without the book's superficially meditating on itself, without making a transparently ideological claim on the reader, and without imparting wisdom, as do Tamkin and King Dahfu, flatly unproblematized.

"Herzog" is Bellow's first protracted expedition as a writer into the immense domain of sex. Herzog's women are of the greatest importance to him, exciting his vanity, arousing his carnality, channelling his love, drawing his curiosity, and, by registering his cleverness, charm, and good looks, feeding in the man the joys of a boy—in their adoration is his validation. With every insult they hurl and every epithet they coin, with each fetching turn of the head, comforting touch of the hand, angry twist of the mouth, his women fascinate Herzog with that human otherness that so overpowers him in *both* sexes. But it is the women especially—until the final pages, that is, when Herzog turns away from his Berkshires retreat even well-meaning Ramona and the generous pleasures of the seraglio that are her specialty, when he at long last emancipates himself from the care of another woman, even this most gentle fondler of them all, and, so as to repair himself, undertakes what is for him the heroic project of living alone, shedding the women and, shedding with them, of all things, the explaining, the justifying, the thinking, divesting himself, if only temporarily, of the all-encompassing and habitual sources of his pleasure and misery—it is the women especially who bring out the portraitist in Herzog, a multitalented painter who can be as lavish in describing the generous mistress as Renoir, as tender in presenting the adorable daughter as Degas, as compassionate, as respectful of age, as knowledgeable of hardship in picturing the ancient stepmother—or his own dear mother in her slavish immigrant misery—as Rembrandt, as devilish, finally, as Daumier in depicting the adulterous wife who discerns, in Herzog's loving and scheming best friend, Valentine Gersbach, her crudely theatrical equal.

In all of literature, I know of no more emotionally susceptible male, of no man who brings a greater focus or intensity to his engagement with women than this Herzog, who collects them both as an adoring suitor and as a husband—a cuckolded husband getting a royal screwing who, in the grandeur of his jealous rage and in the naïveté of his blind uxoriousness, is a kind of comic-strip amalgam of General Othello and Charles Bovary. Anyone wishing to have some fun in retelling "Madame Bovary" from Charles's perspective, or "Anna Karenina" from Karenin's, will find in "Herzog" the perfect how-to book. (Not that one easily envisions Karenin, à la Herzog with Gersbach, handing over to Vronsky Anna's diaphragm.)

"Herzog" lays claim to being a richer novel even than "Augie March" precisely because Bellow's taking on board, for the first time, the full sexual cargo allows for a brand of suffering to penetrate his fictional world that was largely precluded from "Augie" and "Henderson." It turns out that even more is unlocked in the Bellow hero by suffering than by euphoria. How much more credible, how much more *important* he becomes when the male wound, in its festering enormity, ravages the euphoric appetite for "the rich life-cake," and the vulnerability to humiliation, betrayal, melancholy, fatigue, loss, paranoia, obsession, and despair is revealed to be so sweeping that neither an Augie's relentless optimism nor a Henderson's mythical giantism can stave off any longer the truth about pain. Once Bellow grafts onto Henderson's intensity—and onto Augie March's taste for grandiose types and dramatic encounters—Tommy Wilhelm's condition

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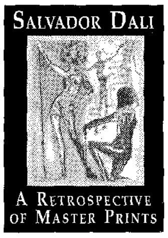

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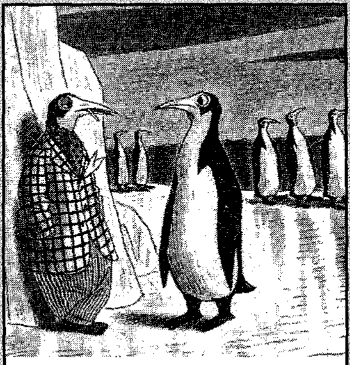

"I just got damn well fed up with being formal all the time."

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of helplessness, he puts the whole Bellovian symphony in play, with its lushly comical orchestration of misery.

In "Herzog," there is no sustained chronological action—there's barely *any* action—that takes place outside of Herzog's brain. It isn't that, as a storyteller, Bellow apes Faulkner in "The Sound and the Fury" or Virginia Woolf in "The Waves." The long, shifting, fragmented interior monologue of "Herzog" seems to have more in common with Gogol's "The Diary of a Madman," where the disjointed perception is dictated by the mental state of the central character rather than by an author's impatience with traditional means of narration. What makes Gogol's madman mad, however, and Bellow's sane, is that Gogol's madman, incapable of overhearing himself, is unfortified by the spontaneous current of irony and parody that ripples through Herzog's every thought—even when Herzog is most bewildered—and that is inseparable from his take on himself and his disaster, however excruciating his pain.

In the Gogol story, the madman obtains a bundle of letters written by a dog, the pet belonging to the young woman of whom he is hopelessly (insanely) enamored. Feverishly, he sits down to read every word the brilliant dog has written, searching for any reference to himself. In "Herzog," Bellow goes Gogol one better—the brilliant dog who writes the letters is Herzog. Letters to his dead mother, to his living mistress, to his first wife, to President Eisenhower, to Chicago's police commissioner, to Adlai Stevenson, to Nietzsche ("My dear sir, May I ask a question from the floor?"), to Teilhard de Chardin ("Dear Father . . . Is the carbon molecule lined with thought?"), to Heidegger ("Dear Doktor Professor . . . I should like to know what you mean by the expression 'the fall into the quotidian.' When did this fall occur? Where were we standing when it happened?"), to the credit department of Marshall Field & Co. ("I am no longer responsible for the debts of Madeleine P. Herzog"), even, in the end, a letter to God ("How my mind has struggled to make coherent sense. I have not been too good at it. But have desired to do your unknowable will, taking it, and you, without symbols. Everything of intensest significance. Especially if divested of me").

This book of a thousand delights offers no greater delight than those letters, and no better key with which to both unlock Herzog's remarkable intelligence and enter into the depths of his turmoil over the wreckage of his life. The letters are his intensity demonstrated; they provide the stage for his intellectual theatre, the one-man show where he is least likely to act the role of the fool.

"MR. SAMMLER'S PLANET" (1970)

"Is our species crazy?" A Swiftian question. A Swiftian note as well in the laconic Sammlerian reply: "Plenty of evidence."

Reading "Mr. Sammler's Planet," I am reminded of "Gulliver's Travels": by the overwhelming estrangement of the hero from the New York of the nineteen-sixties; by the rebuke he, with his history, embodies to the human status of those whose "sexual madness" he must witness; by his Gulliverian obsession with human physicality, human biology, the almost mythic distaste evoked in him by the body, its appearance, its functions, its urges, its pleasures, its secretions and smells. Then, there's the preoccupation with the radical vincibility of one's physical being. As a frail, displaced refugee of the Holocaust horror, as one who escaped miraculously from the Nazi slaughter, who rose, with but one eye, from a pile of Jewish bodies left for dead by a German extermination squad, Mr. Sammler registers perfectly that most disorienting of blows to civic confidence—the disappearance, in a great city, of security, of safety, and, with that, the burgeoning among the vulnerable of fear-ridden, alienating paranoia.

For it is fear as well as disgust that vitiates Sammler's faith in the species and threatens his tolerance even for those closest to him—fear of "the soul . . . in this vehemence . . . the extremism and fanaticism of human nature." Having moved beyond the Crusoe-adventurousness of ebullient Augie and Henderson to delineate, as dark farce, the marital betrayal of the uncomprehending genius Herzog, Bellow next opens out his contemplative imagination to one of the greatest betrayals of all, at least as perceived by the refugee-victim Sammler in his Swiftian revulsion with the sixties: the betrayal by the crazy species of the civilized ideal.

Herzog, during his most searing moment of suffering, admits to himself, "I fail to understand!" But, despite old Sammler's Oxonian reserve and cultivated detachment, at the climax of *his* adventure—with license, disorder, and lawlessness within the network of his vividly eccentric family and beyond them, in New York's streets, subways, buses, shops, and college classrooms—the admission that is wrung from him (and that, for me, stands as the motto of this book) is far more shattering: "I am horrified!"

The triumph of "Mr. Sammler's Planet" is the invention of Sammler, with the credentials that accrue to him through his European education—his history of suffering history, and his Nazi-blinded eye—as "the registrar of madness." The juxtaposition of the personal plight of the protagonist with the particulars of the social forces he encounters, the resounding, ironic rightness of that juxtaposition, accounts for the impact here, as it does in every memorable fiction. Sammler, sharply set apart by his condition of defenseless dignity, strikes me as the perfect instrument to receive anything in society at all bizarre or menacing, the historical victim abundantly qualified by experience to tellingly provide a harsh, hardened twentieth-century perspective on "mankind in a revolutionary condition."

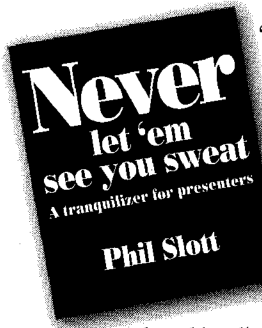
I wonder which came first in the book's development, the madness or the registrar, Sammler or the sixties.

"HUMBOLDT'S GIFT" (1975)

"Humboldt's Gift" is far and away the screwiest of the euphoric going-every-which-way out-and-out comic novels, the books that materialize at the very tip-top of the Bellovian mood swing, the merry music of the egosphere that is "Augie March," "Henderson," and "Humboldt" and that Bellow emits more or less periodically, between his burrowings through the dark down-in-the-dumps novels, such as "The Victim," "Seize the Day," "Mr. Sammler's Planet," and "The Dean's December," where the bewildering pain issuing from the heroes' wounds is not taken lightly either by them or by Bellow. ("Herzog" strikes me as supreme among Bellow's novels for its magical integration of this characteristic divergence. If one wished to play literary chef and turn "Humboldt's Gift" into "Herzog," the simple recipe might go as follows: first, cut away and set aside Humboldt; next, extract from Humboldt his mad suffering and bind it to Citrine's reflective brilliance; last, toss in Gersbach—and there's your book. It's Gersbach's betrayal that stirs up in Herzog the murderous paranoia that is excited in Humboldt by, among others, Citrine!)

"Humboldt" is the screwiest, by which I also mean the most brazen of the comedies, loopier and more carnivalesque than the others, Bellow's only joyously open libidinous book and, rightly, the most recklessly crossbred fusion of disparate strains, and for a paradoxically compelling reason: Citrine's terror. Of what? Of mortality, of having to meet (regardless of his success and his great eminence) Humboldt's fate. Underlying the book's buoyant engagement with the scrambling, gorging, thieving, hating, and destroying of Charlie Citrine's on-the-make world, underlying *everything*, including the centrifugal manner of the book's telling—and exposed directly enough in Citrine's eagerness to metabolize the extinction-defying challenge of Rudolf Steiner's anthroposophy—is his terror of dying. What's disorienting Citrine happens also to be what's blowing narrative decorum to kingdom come: the panicky dread of oblivion, the old-fashioned garden-variety Everyman horror of death.

"How sad," says Citrine, "about all this human nonsense which keeps us from the large truth." But the human nonsense is just what he loves—at least loves to recount—and what delights him most about being alive. Again: "When . . . would I rise . . . above all . . . the wastefully and randomly human . . . to enter higher worlds?" Higher worlds? Where would Citrine be—where would *Bellow* be—without the randomly human driving the superdrama of the *lower* world, the elemental superdrama that is the worldly desire for fame (as exhibited by Von Humboldt Fleisher, the luckless, mentally unsound counterpart of fortu-



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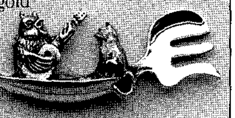
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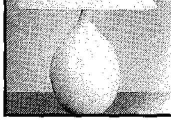
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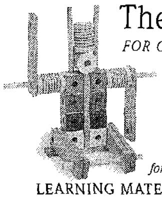
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nate, sane Citrine—Humboldt, who wishes both to be spiritual and to make it big, and whose nightmare failure is the flip-side travesty of Citrine's success), for money (Humboldt, Thaxter, Denise, plus Renata's mother the Señora, plus Citrine's brother Julius, plus more or less everyone else), for revenge (Denise, Cantabile), for esteem (Humboldt, Cantabile, Thaxter, Citrine), for the hottest of hot sex (Citrine, Renata, et al.), not to mention that worldliest of worldly desires, Citrine's own, the hellbent lusting after life eternal?

Why does Citrine wish so feverishly never to leave here if not for this laugh-a-minute immersion in the violence and the turbulence of the clownish greediness that he disparagingly calls "the moronic inferno"? "Some people," he says, "are so actual that they beat down my critical powers." And beat down any desire to exchange even the connection to their viciousness for the serenity of the everlasting. Where but the moronic inferno could his "complicated subjectivity" have so much to take in? Out in some vaporous Zip Codeless noplace, nostalgically swapping moronic-inferno stories with the shade of Rudolf Steiner?

And isn't it something like the same moronic inferno that Charlie Citrine excitedly memorializes as it rages in the streets, courtrooms, bedrooms, restaurants, sweat baths, and office buildings of Chicago that so sickens Artur Sammler in its diabolic nineteen-sixties-Manhattan incarnation? "Humboldt's Gift" seems like the enlivening tonic Bellow brewed to recover from the sorrowful grieving and moral suffering of "Mr. Sammler's Planet." It's Bellow's cheerful version of Ecclesiastes: All is vanity and isn't it something!

WHAT'S HE IN CHICAGO FOR?

Humboldt on Citrine (my edition page 2): "After making this dough why does he bury himself in the sticks? What's he in Chicago for?"

Citrine on himself (page 63): "My mind was in one of its Chicago states. How should I describe this phenomenon?"

Citrine on being a Chicagoan (page 95): "I could feel the need to laugh rising, mounting, always a sign that my weakness for the sensational, my American, Chicagoan (as well as personal) craving for high stimuli, for incongruities and extremes, was aroused."

And (further along on page 95): "Such information about corruption, if you had grown up in Chicago, was easy to accept. It even satisfied a certain need. It harmonized with one's Chicago view of society."

On the other hand, there's Citrine's being out of place in Chicago (page 225): "In Chicago my personal aims were bunk, my outlook a foreign ideology." And (page 251): "It was now apparent to me that I was neither of Chicago nor sufficiently beyond it, and that Chicago's material and daily interests and phenomena were neither actual and vivid enough nor symbolically clear enough to me."

Keeping in mind these remarks—and there are many more like them throughout "Humboldt's Gift"—look back to the nineteen-forties and observe that Bellow started off as a writer *without* Chicago's organizing his idea of himself the way it does Charlie Citrine's. Yes, a few Chicago streets are occasionally sketched in as the backdrop to "Dangling Man," but, aside from darkening the pervasive atmosphere of gloom, Chicago seems a place that is almost foreign to the hero; certainly it is alien to him. "Dangling Man" is not a book about a man in a city—it's about a mind in a room. Not until the third book, "Augie March," did Bellow fully apprehend Chicago as that valuable hunk of literary property, that tangible, engrossing American place that was his to claim as commandingly as Sicily was monopolized by Verga, London by Dickens, and the Mississippi River by Mark Twain. It's with a comparable tentativeness or wariness that Faulkner (the other of America's two greatest twentieth-century novelist-regionalists) came to imaginative ownership of Lafayette County, Mississippi. Faulkner situated his first book, "Soldier's Pay" (1926), in Georgia, his second, "Mosquitoes" (1927), in New Orleans, and it was only with the masterly burst of "Sartoris," "The Sound and the Fury," and "As I Lay Dying," in 1929-30, that he found—as did Bellow after taking *his* first, impromptu geographical steps—the precise location to engender those human struggles which, in turn, would fire up his intensity and provoke that impassioned response to a place and its history which at times propels Faulkner's sentences to the brink of unintelligibility and even beyond.

I wonder if at the outset Bellow shied away from seizing Chicago as his simply because he didn't want to be known as a Chicago writer, any more, perhaps, than he wanted to be known as a Jewish writer. Yes, you're from Chicago, and of course you're a Jew—but how these things are going to figure in your work, or if they should figure at all, isn't easy to puzzle out right off. Besides, you have other ambitions, inspired by your European masters, by Dostoyevsky, Gogol, Proust, Kafka, and such ambitions don't include writing about the neighbors gabbing on the back porch. . . . Does this line of thought in any way resemble Bellow's before he finally laid claim to the immediate locale?

Of course, after "Augie" it was some ten years before, in "Herzog," Bellow took on Chicago in a big way again. Ever since then, the distinctly "Chicago view" has been of recurring interest to him, especially when the city provides, as in "Humboldt," a contrast of comically illuminating proportions between "the open life which is elementary, easy for everyone to read, and characteristic of this place, Chicago, Illinois" and the reflective bent of the preoccupied hero. This combat, vigorously explored, is at the heart of "Humboldt," as it is of Bellow's next novel, "The Dean's December" (1982). Here, however, the exploration is not comic but rancorous. The depravity deepens, the mood darkens, and under the pressure of violent racial antagonisms Chicago, Illinois, becomes demoniacal.

"On his own turf . . . he found a wilderness wilder than the Guiana bush . . . desolation . . . endless square miles of ruin . . . wounds, lesions, cancers, destructive fury, death . . . the terrible wildness and dread in this huge place."

The book's very point is that this huge place is Bellow's no longer. Nor is it Augie's, Herzog's, or Citrine's. By the time he comes to write "The Dean's December," some thirty years after "Augie March," his hero, Dean Corde, has become the city's Sammler.

What is he in Chicago for? This Chicagoan in pain no longer knows. Bellow is banished. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

Collected Poems in English, *by Joseph Brodsky (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $30).* As a young poet under Anna Akhmatova's wing in Leningrad, and then as a resident of the Soviet camp system, Brodsky taught himself English mainly by reading Donne, Frost, Hardy, and Auden. When he finally arrived in America, in 1972, his spoken English was rough, but over time his confidence grew to the point where he supervised the translations of his own work and even wrote poems directly in English. In Russian, Brodsky is a singular master, the writer of his era, but, as this volume shows, in English he is uneven, ranging from the heights of "A Part of Speech" to varieties of wordplay and the obscure. Make no mistake: the reader will find here some of the great moments of twentieth-century verse—"The End of a Beautiful Era," "Lullaby of Cape Cod," "The Hawk's Cry in Autumn"—but the difficulty of "Englishing" Brodsky is also evident. The main problems are rooted in the aesthetic complications of his Russian line. Brodsky's Russian—like Mandelstam's and Andrei Platonov's—is packed with allusion, with ideas, with intricate rhythmic play. And though Brodsky was understandably loath to admit it, sometimes even his best translators could not quite keep up with him.

Fanny Kemble's Civil Wars, *by Catherine Clinton (Simon & Schuster; $26),* and Fanny Kemble's Journals, *edited by Catherine Clinton (Harvard; $16.95).* In 1834, when Kemble, a member of England's leading theatrical family, was a twenty-four-year-old star, she married Pierce Butler, a Philadelphia playboy, and left the stage. They got along poorly. When he took her to visit the plantations he had inherited in Georgia's Sea Islands, the sight of slavery intensified her commitment to abolitionism. And, as Butler later explained in a self-justifying pamphlet, Kemble had a "peculiar" view of marriage as "companionship on equal terms—partnership." Kemble struggled with the unjust laws of a male-dominated society before winning a divorce, in 1849, but Butler continued to control her because he had custody of their young daughters. By 1863, however, the girls were grown, and Kemble, living in England, felt free to publish her "Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation," which she hoped would counter British sympathy for the Confederacy. Kemble's life wasn't entirely devoted to the rights of women and the wrongs of slavery: she acted and wrote, had triumphs, pleasures, and friends, and she often feels like our contemporary. Clinton doesn't insist that her subject was flawless, but she finds her irresistible.

DE BIJENKORF
TE HUUR

The Scalpel and the Butterfly, *by Deborah Rudacille (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $25).* In this excellent exploration of the conflict between animal protection and animal research, the author resolutely resists simplistic answers. A clear-eyed survey of animal-rights leaders—from the Victorian anti-vivisectionist Anna Kingsford to "new crusaders" like Ingrid Newkirk, a founder of PETA—coexists with a discussion of Nazi Germany's pro-vegetarianism, anti-vivisection policies. ("Does an elevation in the moral status of animals inevitably result in a degradation in the moral status of human beings?") One chapter, on Salk and the polio vaccine, illustrates the peak of the public's trust in the benevolent authority of modern science, but another offers a (very readable) postmodern critique of the scientific "trend toward normalization." The effect is of a series of paradoxes, elegantly expressed. By showing the spectrum of possible views between the moral absolutism of one camp and the unrepentant materialism of the other, this valuable book suggests a vast ground for compromise.

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ON TELEVISION

TAPING THE TORCH

NBC brings athletes in their prime to prime time.

BY NANCY FRANKLIN

As Yogi Berra famously said, it ain't over till it's over, but suspense, the tingly backbone of sports, was not the hallmark of NBC's coverage of the Sydney Summer Olympics; the network's motto might have been "It's over before we even start." In the last two weeks, NBC, along with its cable networks MSNBC and CNBC, broadcast a record four hundred and forty-one hours of the Games, but, because of the fifteen-hour time difference between Sydney and New York—and because of NBC's decision to show the hot-ticket sports (swimming, gymnastics, track and field) during prime time—not one single second of the twenty-seventh Olympiad was broadcast live. We're now accustomed to seeing everything on TV before we read about it in the paper, but in this case the old-fashioned ink-and-paper tortoise often beat out the electronic hare, and American viewers found themselves in the position of watching events whose results they had known for hours. (Canadians, on the other hand, could watch the Games live, and anyone with a radio or an Internet connection could get instant results.) Contributing to the canned atmosphere was Bob Costas, the host of the Games, who sat alone most of the time in what appeared to be a hermetically sealed studio, and who seemed to be dulled, if not defeated, by the task of providing hours of live narration to accompany the taped events. Except for Svetlana Khorkina, the pouty diva of the Russian gymnastics team, who was a singularly unpleasant presence in the Games until she finally got the gold medal she came for, Costas appeared to be the only person in Sydney who wasn't having any fun; enthusiasm was more than he could muster, and only occasionally was he able to summon up even a little Costasian drollery.

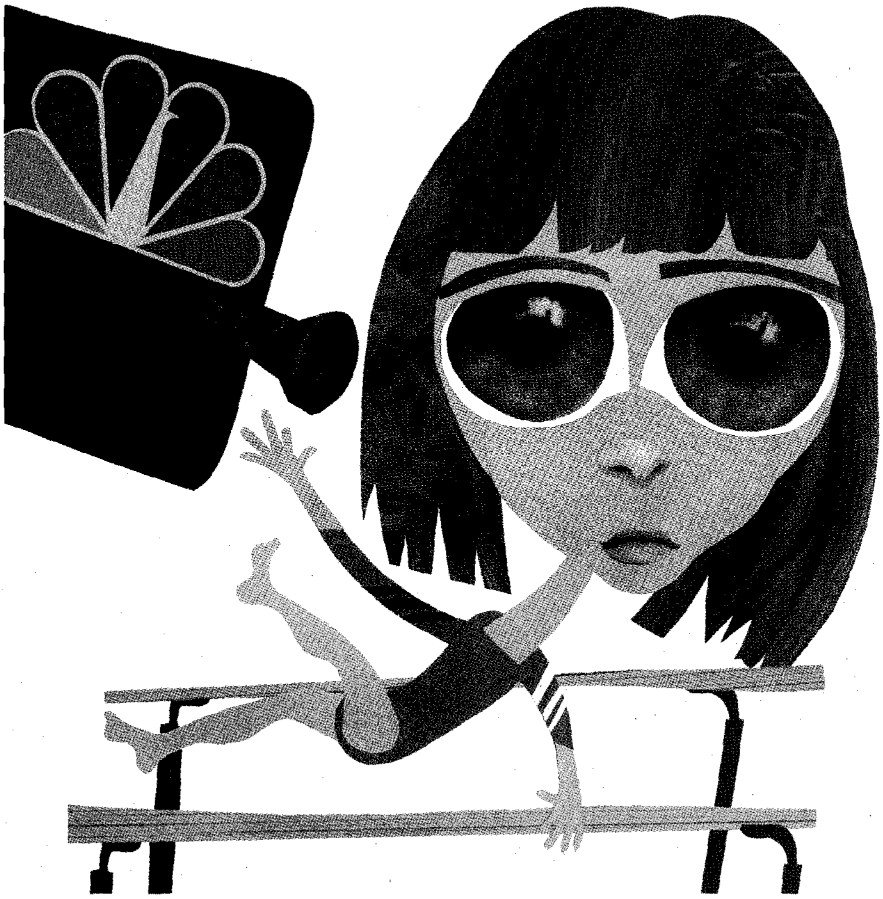
This was not, of course, the first time that television coverage of an Olympics was affected by the fact that today in the United States is tomorrow somewhere else in the world, and in fact NBC tried, in its own way, to turn this disadvantage into an asset. (In its own, unsuccessful way, that is: ratings for these Olympics were way below NBC's expectations. Perhaps the network should have taken some performance-enhancing drugs.) If NBC could not show us eggs breaking, it would at least serve us a lavishly garnished omelette. Time and again, when an athlete was about to compete—was preparing to do a vault, or was standing on the starting block at the pool—the natural sequence of events was interrupted, and a heartwarming profile of the competitor, filmed with rich, creamy production values, and skewed, whenever possible, in the direction of patriotism, would roll. (The fact that the swimmer Lenny Krayzelburg, who won three gold medals, immigrated to the United States from Ukraine when he was thirteen was interminably harped upon.) Some people loved these features, and some found them annoyingly beside the point. I liked them, or, rather, I would have liked them if they hadn't been simply sappy one-dimensional washes of color; as it is, I would gladly have forgone most of them in order to see, say, a table-tennis match. Instead of giving you any sense at all of what makes an Olympic athlete, these profiles were airbrushed, soft-focus "Lifestyles of the Fit and Gifted." The vignettes on the women gymnasts were perhaps the most offensive; the countless lingering closeups of the young women's faces made them look like collectible dolls being sold on QVC. Female gymnasts have been fetishized by TV since the days of Olga Korbut and Nadia Comaneci, and the Sydney Games were no exception. During the team competition, whenever the Russian girls finished their routines, the NBC commentators obsessively noted whether or not their coach/daddy-figure, Leonid Arkayev, gave them an approving kiss, and a profile of the Russian team was accompanied by the swoony tunes of Enya. (The gymnasts themselves seem to have internalized the mandate to be adorable: it is the only sport I'm aware of that involves the application of glitter—fairy dust—to the face and hair.)

One of the big stories in the gymnastics realm occurred during the all-around competition, when it was discovered that the vault had mistakenly been set five centimetres lower than it should have been; the gymnasts—including Khorkina and the American Elise Ray, who were most obviously affected by this major blunder—were offered the chance to redo the event, but the evening was irreversibly soured. At least, though, the snafu forced the one-trick commentators to talk about something other than the poor dismounts that had marked the competition; for several nights, all we'd heard about from Elfi Schlegel and Tim Daggett was the failure of the gymnasts, male and female, to "stick their landings."

The soft coverage that the Games received in prime time is thought to be appealing to women, who are big Olympics watchers, and viewers who complained about it to me seemed to think it was something relatively new, but in fact it's a continuing evolution of a revolution that was begun by Roone Arledge in the early sixties, even before he became the head of ABC Sports. In a 1960 memo to his boss about coverage of football on TV—a memo reprinted in Marc Gunther and Bill Carter's excellent 1988 book, "Monday Night Mayhem"—Arledge wrote, "We must gain and hold the interest of women and others who are not fanatic followers of the sport we happen to be televising. Women come to football games, not so much to marvel at the deftness of the quarterback . . . but to sit in a crowd, see what everyone else is wearing, watch the cheerleaders and experience the countless things that make up the feeling of the game." (If that was true forty years ago, it isn't any longer, though this seems like a good place to mention that the uniforms of the American athletes this year were the plug-ugliest creations I have ever seen.) Dick Ebersol, the head of NBC Sports and therefore the grand pooh-bah of the Olympics, worked closely with Arledge at ABC for a number of years and learned his lessons well.

STEPHEN KRONINGER

These days, every Olympics brings with it a handful of new events, and the Sydney Games were no exception. Among the sports introduced this year were women's weight lifting, the triathlon, trampoline, and, believe it or not, synchronized diving. While synchronized diving is certainly an activity, I have now spent many hours trying to figure out how it could possibly be considered a sport, let alone an Olympic sport, and I have come up empty-headed; I don't understand why doing something at the same time as someone else is thought to be worthy of Olympic hardware. When my next-door neighbor and I leave our apartment building at the same time, should we get a medal? (And, if so, will a curbside commentator be on hand to ask me how it feels to be the first Ohio-born person to win a gold in the synchronized-departure event? After the swimmer Tom Melchow won a butterfly event, a commentator, referring to his nickname among his teammates, asked him, "Have you graduated now from Puppy Chow to Top Dog?" Melchow refrained from biting him.)



Many viewers of the Sydney Summer Olympics seemed to feel that NBC, in choosing not to broadcast any events live, had slipped on the equipment.

O.K., so coverage of the Sydney Games, everyone agrees, wasn't perfect. And the Olympics themselves aren't what they used to be, either. The ideal of amateurism has long since fallen by the wayside, and controversies of one kind or another—drugs, high-tech swimsuits, egregiously nonsporting behavior on the part of the International Olympic Committee—have eroded some of the unique thrill that sets the Olympics apart from every other sports competition in the world. Still, the two-week display of larger-than-life excellence (if you can forget the gymnasts' unstuck landings), the stunning, hard-won beauty of the athletes' bodies and what they were able to achieve with them, and the do-or-die nature of the competition, played out before the entire world, were nothing less than awe-inspiring—whether you knew the results ahead of time or not. In a way, the complaints about the time delay are laughable; to be able to watch these men and women go beyond normal human limits even for a moment and give us so many glimpses of heartbreaking greatness—well, that is something worth waiting for. ♦

THE SKY LINE

SUBURBAN GRANDEUR

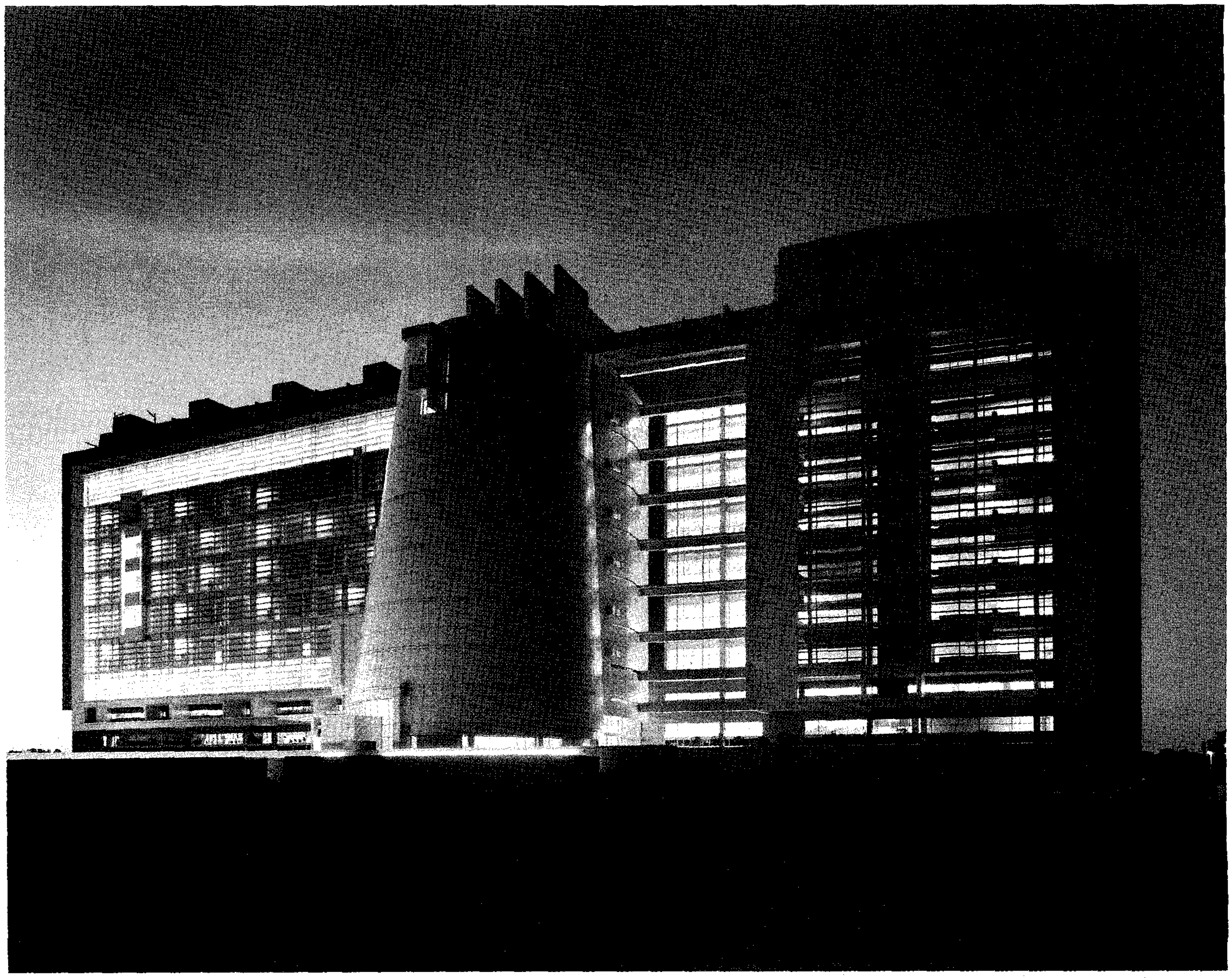
A glamorous government building has just gone up in Islip.

BY PAUL GOLDBERGER

When Richard Meier was interviewed by the federal judges on the committee in charge of selecting an architect for a new courthouse in Central Islip, on eastern Long Island, he showed them pictures of the buildings he had done before, and said, "What you see is what you get." What he meant was that he would design a sleek white structure for them, one that was of a piece with the line of Meier buildings stretching from the sleek white Smith House on Long Island Sound in Connecticut, which made him famous in 1967, to the sleek off-white Getty Center in Los Angeles, which opened a couple of years ago. Meier has a way of doing things, and he does not bend with the wind.

Central Islip is Rick Lazio and Al D'Amato territory. It's not the sort of place where architecturally adventurous public buildings get built. "I don't like modern," the chairman of the selection committee, Judge Leonard Wexler, said to me. "We're all conservative judges here. Even the liberals are conservative judges here." But Wexler's wife admires Meier's work, and she made a persuasive case for considering him for the commission. Later this month, what is probably the least conservative piece of new public architecture in the state will be dedicated in Islip. The two-hundred-million-dollar courthouse hasn't a single column, pediment, pilaster, or frieze. It is the best example I have seen for a long time of architecture that is at once modern and ennobling, and it is the finest public building designed by Meier in years.

The judges and the General Services Administration, which developed the project, left Meier (and his local partner, the Spector Group) pretty much alone, and apparently there were no nasty battles in Islip of the kind that took place during the construction of the Getty. Meier seems to have bent over backward to prove that he is not arrogant and that he could make a courthouse that would be as functional as anyone else's. But this



Richard Meier's United States Courthouse and Federal Building in Central Islip, Long Island. Photograph by Robert Polidori.

is not an important building simply because its layout is clear and all the courtrooms and offices are in the right place. Lesser architects than Meier manage such tricks all the time, if not as often as they would have us think. Meier's achievement in Islip is to have figured out, more clearly than ever before, how to project the aura of traditional architecture without using any of its forms—how to design a building that bears not the slightest resemblance to a classical courthouse yet has the formality and public grandeur that we associate with classical architecture.

Meier's buildings are never particularly radical. They don't have awkward angles or strange shapes or funny colors. They strike a lot of people as cold, but you almost never hear anyone call them weird. The oddest thing about the Islip courthouse is the huge entry rotunda in the form of a tapered white cylinder, sort of a truncated cone, that stands in front of the twelve-story slab of the main building and is nearly as tall. I heard several people refer to it as a coffee pot, but they didn't do so sneeringly. The building is too alluring for that.

The main structure faces south. Public corridors run along the front windows, and from the high floors one can see all the way across Great South Bay to Fire Island. Twenty-two windowless courtrooms have been built behind the corridors, and behind the courtrooms, facing north, are judges' chambers and other offices. Meier has divided the building between backstage and public areas as bluntly as you would lay out a theatre, and, like a theatre designer—and unlike most courthouse designers—he has given the public the best space, full of light and views and room to meander.

The sense of civic grandeur begins outside, in a wide plaza leading up to the entry rotunda. This is a building you approach with a sense of occasion, and Meier has deliberately and unapologetically created his version of a classical rotunda, spatially complex and brilliantly articulated. It is a huge, hollow space, with light tumbling in from skylights so that slices of sun migrate across the curving walls as the hours pass. From the rotunda, you move into the main slab, where there is more monumental space—a rectangular atrium running the building's full height, with open walkways for the public on one side and for judges on the other, and more views. The atrium leads to the only court space that is not within the main slab: a large ceremonial courtroom, intended for major trials and public events, in a free-standing cube behind the building, its mass balancing the rotunda at the front.

The subtle curve of the south façade of the main building, which has elaborate sunscreens that both shield the windows and create a rich texture, plays off well against the mass of the conical rotunda. Meier has constructed most of the building out of glass and white-painted aluminum panels, his favorite materials, but there is a wall of gray granite that cuts through the building and forms a visual backdrop for the façade as well as marking the point of separation between the public circulation areas and the courtrooms and judges' chambers. The south façade is one of Meier's most lyrical, exquisitely balanced compositions: solids play against voids, delicate lines against flat surfaces, curving forms against straight masses. Meier has a painter's intuitive sense of balance, and he understands depth and foreground as well as any architect alive. Modernist architectural dogma dismisses composition as effete fussiness and emphasizes the expression of structure, but Meier doesn't seem to care. He is an absolute modernist in one sense and an indifferent one in another. As a maker of compositions, he seems to have more in common with Stanford White or Cass Gilbert than with, say, Walter Gropius. He uses the formal vocabulary of modernism, but he exploits it for traditional ends, which may be one of the reasons Meier's buildings are so popular.

It is common to speak of Meier's aesthetic as having its roots in the International Style, and particularly in the work of Le Corbusier in the nineteen-twenties. This is true, up to a point, but Meier's buildings are full of depth and shadow, and they make modern buildings from the twenties and thirties seem flat. In some ways, they are closer to Le Corbusier's late work, buildings like the High Court in Chandigarh, India, and the Unité d'Habitation apartment complex in Marseilles—harsh concrete compositions that gave birth to the

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style known as Brutalism. What Meier has done, perhaps unconsciously, is join the formal complexity of late Le Corbusier to the pure, graceful whiteness of early Le Corbusier. He has made Brutalism light and pristine, and not brutal at all. Meier has pulled together contradictory strands of his mentor's work into a style that connects to both periods and yet feels like something that belongs to him alone.

Meier's work has never changed much stylistically, but his buildings have become both bolder and more refined in the last few years. At one time, they were not nearly as rich compositionally as they are now. He makes delightful use of circular forms (the rounded sections of the Getty Research Institute are one of the best aspects of the huge museum complex), and his ability to manipulate light and space seems more assured. His best recent work has been fairly small in scale—the Museum of Television and Radio in Beverly Hills, a house in Florida, a low-rise office building in Basel. Meier's architecture depends on precision, almost delicacy, and when the buildings are very large they can sometimes seem a bit overwrought, as if he couldn't stop designing. At the Getty—it is Meier's fate that all of his buildings, not just his museums, are going to be compared to the Getty for a while—everything, from the site and the program to the budget, was so big that the fine grain disappeared. Things blurred. But the Islip courthouse is big enough to be monumental and small enough to be refined. It looks tall (and is, in fact, the tallest building in Suffolk County), largely because it is unencumbered by the presence of other buildings. Meier doesn't do as well when he has to make a group of buildings in an architectural context, as at the Getty. You wouldn't want a whole city of Richard Meier buildings. They look much better when they are individual jewels shining among other architects' rocks, or sitting alone in nature.

It's a peculiarity of the Islip site that the federal courthouse can be seen both against other architects' buildings and by itself against a backdrop of trees. It is set on twenty-nine acres adjacent to a sprawling county-courthouse complex of red brick buildings that looks like a prosperous suburban hospital. This being Long Island, there is enough surface parking to serve a shopping mall, and most of it acts as a buffer between the county courthouse and Meier's building. The sixteen hundred and seventy-seven parking spaces have been cleverly separated from the federal courthouse by an entry drive, so that they don't clutter up Meier's immaculate realm. Unless you are a judge or a prisoner (in which case you drive or are driven to the back of the building and go into a secure parking area underground, which has room for three hundred and sixty-six cars), you enter the courthouse by walking up two wide tiers of steps and then crossing three hundred feet of a paved podium. Usually, this much pavement leading up to a front door seems ominous, even Fascist. Meier's façade is so beautiful and so compelling that the vast expanse seems benign. Most people get their first glimpse of the building not from the site, however, but from just south of it, along the Southern State Parkway, where it rises above the trees and comes into view with stunning suddenness as you drive around a curve. It is a breathtaking sight, embodying one of modernism's great fantasies, the notion of the building as a pure and perfect object set, like a piece of sculpture, in nature: the dream of the machine in the garden.

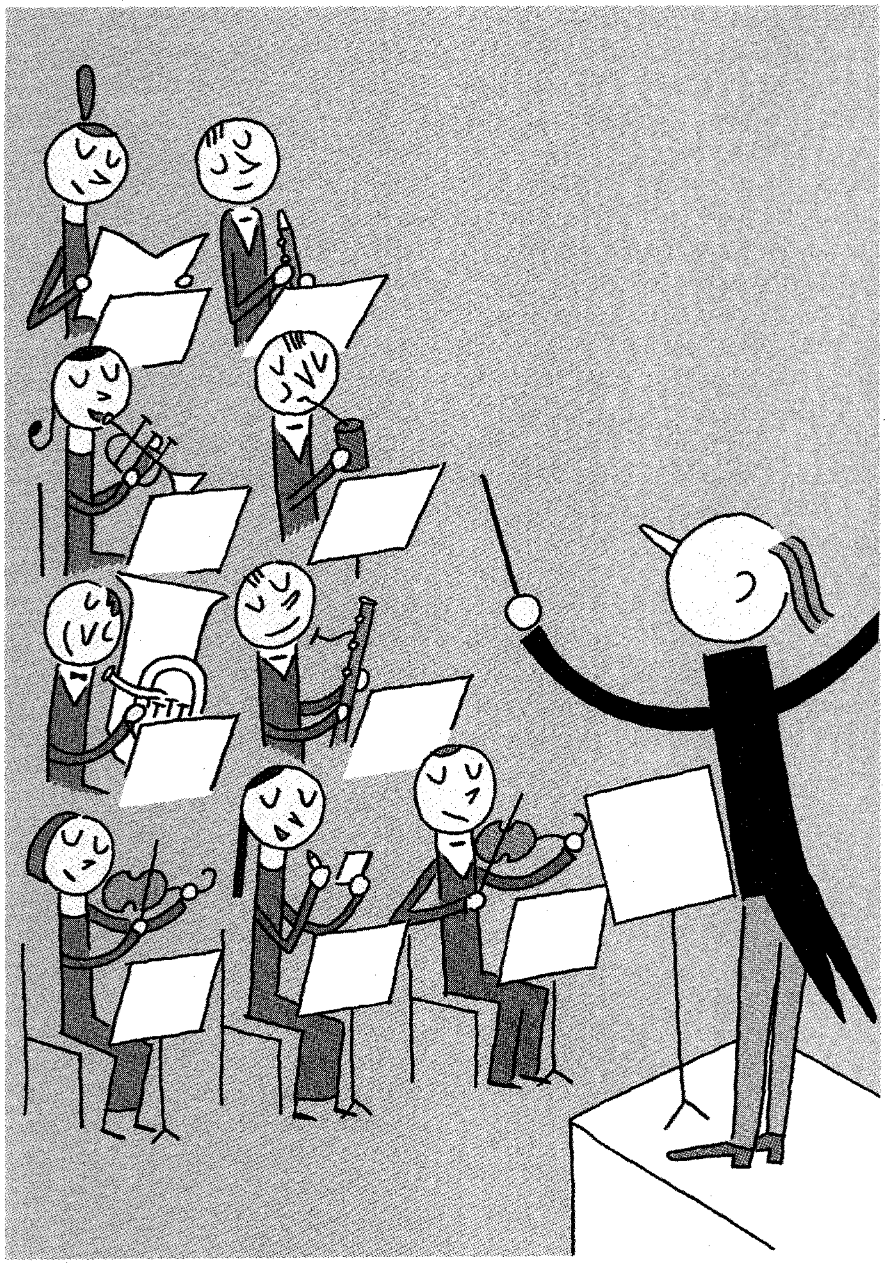
This is the best federal courthouse built since the early nineteen-sixties, when the complex in downtown Chicago designed by Mies van der Rohe (which became famous as the location of the Chicago Seven trial in 1969) went up. But if you look at Mies's elegant glass slabs quickly, you might take them for a set of high-end office buildings. Richard Meier has tried to make his building look like a courthouse, or at least a contemporary version of a courthouse. The rotunda, the atrium, the corridors, and the understated courtrooms themselves, handsomely panelled in cherrywood, are nothing like Mies's universal architecture. Meier wanted not a generic building but a very specific one that would have the resonance as a civic symbol that old courthouses do. He made a modern building that is part of the public realm. ♦

MUSICAL EVENTS

MAESTRO! MAESTRO!

American orchestras scramble for conductors.

BY ALEX ROSS



The cautious house style of most American symphony orchestras is: No mistakes.

PHILIPPE PETIT-ROULET

A couple of weekends ago, Mariss Jansons, who is a candidate to become the next director of the New York Philharmonic, conducted the Pittsburgh Symphony in "The Star-Spangled Banner." It was the opening night of the Pittsburgh's hundred-and-fifth season. Various officials, including the chief executive of Allegheny County, made speeches, and the handsome auditorium of Heinz Hall resonated with civic pride. I usually tune out this kind of pomp and circumstance, but in Pittsburgh I found myself on the edge of my seat—not because of the speeches but because of the "Star-Spangled Ban-

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ner." It was, strange to say, the most impressive performance of the anthem I'd ever heard. Unnecessarily passionate, it hinted at the qualities that emerged in the main part of the program. From the moment he walked onstage, Jansons incited the players to dig into music that they might otherwise have played routinely. Energy radiated out of him, forward to the orchestra and backward into the hall.

A few nights later, the Philharmonic played its first subscription concert of the season—the inaugural concert in a Mendelssohn festival. It was, honestly, a snooze. First, the sound was poor. As cities around the country renovate their old halls or build new ones, it becomes ever more painfully clear that Avery Fisher Hall is a dead space for music. Last year, Lincoln Center announced that it was planning yet another expensive renovation of the hall—the fourth such makeover in its history. Lincoln Center might have saved both money and face if it had followed George Szell's advice in 1964: "Tear the place down and start over again." Second, there was not much heat in the orchestra's playing. Nothing went egregiously wrong, nothing went spectacularly right. Under Kurt Masur, the Philharmonic has grown more disciplined, but it has got stuck somewhere around the B-plus level, which is where a lot of American orchestras reside.

The orchestra scene is in flux. The center of gravity has moved westward: to Pittsburgh, where Jansons has his musicians playing at a world-class level; to Cleveland, where Christoph von Dohnányi leads programs as daring as they are fine; and to San Francisco, where Michael Tilson Thomas mixes new and old in high style. New York, Boston, and Philadelphia are in the doldrums. While the world of opera has lately had a resurgence, seducing audiences with new work, new stagings, and new voices, the Eastern orchestras look more and more like dinosaurs in shrines. People don't talk much about them, other than to guess which frequent-flier conductor is going to replace the last one. The boards that run these institutions come from the corporate world, and they have tried to liven things up with corporate strategies: demographic marketing, lowest-common-denominator programming, and so on. What they need is conductors who have the talent, time, and imagination for the job.

The symphony orchestra used to be a towering presence in American culture. It was, despite its European trappings, a characteristically American invention—a musical museum that acquired Old Masters and showed them to the upwardly mobile masses. While European orchestras were, for the most part, opera ensembles that performed concerts on the side, their American counterparts specialized in symphonies from the outset. Every city proudly followed the fortunes of its home team. The phenomenon crested in the nineteen-forties, when Arturo Toscanini became the nation's conductor-in-chief. R.C.A. sold twenty million Toscanini records, and millions of people listened to him on NBC radio. For a moment, it seemed as though classical music, the most aristocratic of the arts, would become part of electronic mass culture. But the executives wanted ever bigger numbers, and the moment passed.

Things might have turned out differently if orchestras had not been so conservative by nature. "Churches, even banks, are more open to experiment," Virgil Thomson complained, in one of his regular attacks on the mid-century music business. If the orchestra were to join up with the larger culture, Thomson said, it would have to invest more emotion in the standard repertory and show more interest in the music of its time. This critique is still valid. The American orchestra errs on the side of caution. The house style is: No mistakes. Brass players haze one another for minor flubs, and pedants in the audience gasp at a single wrong note. (I like hearing the occasional flub; it usually means that someone is trying harder.) String players, likewise, tend to strive for absolute uniformity of rhythm and correctness of pitch. The result is a sound that is technically brilliant but emotionally distant. American orchestral musicians are famous for sneering at conductors who talk about meaning and expression rather than the B-flat three bars before C. Then they wonder why their audience is made up of sleepy dentists.

Every once in a while, the "American style" evolves to a point where its defects vanish in a haze of perfection. This used to happen in Boston; now it happens in Cleveland. In the fifties, George Szell made the Cleveland Orchestra the ultimate virtuoso ensemble, and Christoph von Dohnányi, who has led it since 1984, may have raised it

"So what if he paid a classmate to do his homework—it was his own allowance."

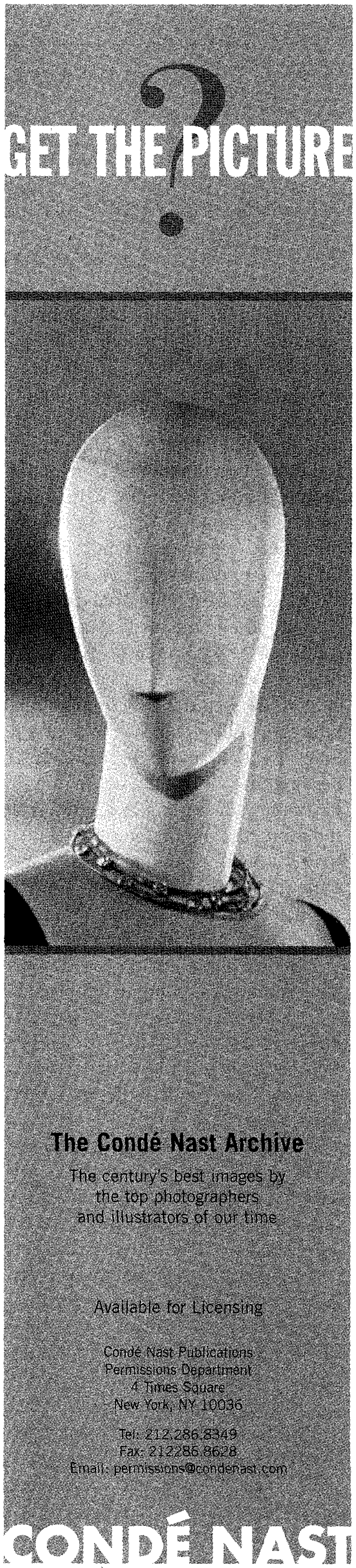
even higher. The Cleveland is organized, like a utopian society, into "cells," with the senior players of each section mentoring the younger. As Donald Rosenberg comments, in his absorbing new book, "The Cleveland Orchestra Story," the standard is high no matter who is on the podium; the orchestra declines to advertise its discontents by playing listlessly. It built ties to the Cleveland community long before education and outreach became clichés of orchestral management. And in Severance Hall, a magical place patterned in silver leaves, it has the loveliest auditorium in America. On opening weekend, Dohnányi led an uncommonly elegant performance of Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony. On the acoustical cushion of Severance, which recently underwent a renovation, the sound had a diamond glitter.

For all its flawlessness, the Cleveland is not afraid to experiment. Dohnányi has weaned his audience away from the belief that all great music was written in the nineteenth century. The opening program mixed Tchaikovsky with Magnus Lindberg's "Cantigas," a festive overture in maximalist style, and Luciano Berio's "Folksongs," a pleasant artifact of the sixties. Eight other works on this season's schedule—including Hans Werner Henze's "Requiem," which the Cleveland plays this week at Carnegie Hall—are by living composers. This is still a conservative number, but Dohnányi has judged the balance wisely. Orchestras have always been rooted in the past; when Mendelssohn conducted the Leipzig Gewandhaus, in the eighteen-forties, half the repertory came from dead composers. Dohnányi's view of the past is, however, entirely different from Mendelssohn's. Most of the works on the Cleveland schedule had not yet been written at the time orchestras first became "museumlike" in orientation.

The repertory is not a fixed canon; it simply changes at a glacial pace. Witness the program that Mariss Jansons chose for opening night in Pittsburgh: Respighi's "Roman Festivals," Bartók's Concerto for Orchestra, and Barber's Violin Concerto, with the eloquent young Hilary Hahn. The dates of composition were 1928, 1943, and 1939. But it wasn't the twentieth-century bias in the programming that stood out—it was the flare of emotion in the playing. The lower strings had the rich, chesty tone that you hear in Russian orchestras, and that Jansons, a protégé of the great Evgeny Mravinsky, must carry in his luggage. The brass was brilliant, but all American brass is brilliant: these players also gave off warmth. The winds sang out like human voices, embroidering their lines with breaks and cries. The violins, playing the big theme in the third movement of the Bartók, bowed so vigorously that the sound seemed to fray at the edges. Then they turned abruptly icy in the long note that closes out the tune. Jansons is not simply a backward-looking romantic; he first draws out atmospheric, not-quite-together playing, then signals a change of tempo or dynamics with vicious precision. His interpretations are as intelligent as they are vital.

American orchestras should take more chances on conductors like Jansons. What's strange is that so many positions are open and so few names are being proposed. Gifted Americans such as James Conlon and Kent Nagano don't seem to be under active consideration. Robert Spano, who has strong ties in both Boston and New York, was allowed to go to the Atlanta Symphony. Boston missed its chance at Simon Rattle. Meanwhile, the Philharmonic had a prolonged flirtation with Riccardo Muti, who, everyone seems to have forgotten, used to conduct the Philadelphia Orchestra. What did Muti do in Philadelphia that would bear repeating in New York? The selection process seems a bizarre mixture of caution and haste. Only those who have recently guest-conducted the orchestra in question are considered, and they are judged by the standards of a frat-house rush.

Still, there are signs that the Eastern orchestras may soon rebound. Boston and Philadelphia are both considering Christoph Eschenbach, who can deliver Brahms and Christopher Rouse with equal conviction. And if New York goes with Jansons it will have, for the first time since Leonard Bernstein, a conductor who has the power to surprise. ♦



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CONDÉ NAST

THE CURRENT CINEMA

ACTORS AND ADDICTS

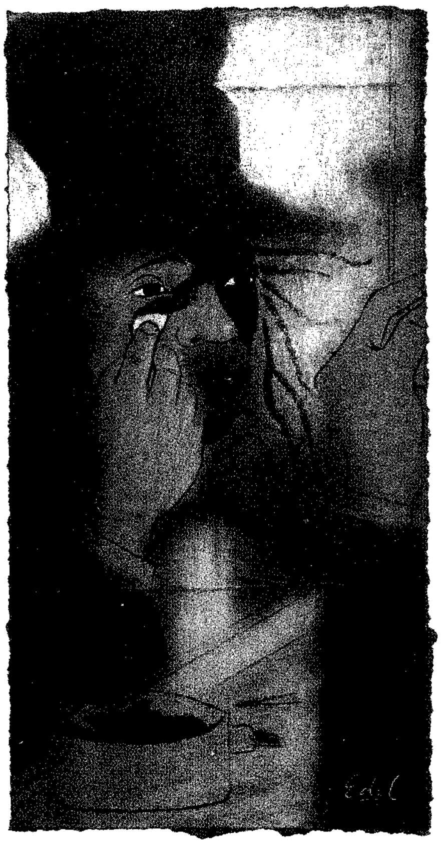
Spike Lee on the lure of television, Darren Aronofsky on other drugs.

BY ANTHONY LANE

The new Spike Lee film, "Bamboozled," is about a writer. At least, I think he's a writer. We see him looking thoughtful behind a large desk with a little tub of sharpened pencils in front of him, so I guess he must be. He certainly has the writer's stiff-necked pride, as we learn in the opening scene. "My name is Pierre Delacroix," he declares in voice-over, as the camera circles him and Stevie Wonder warbles on the soundtrack. Pierre is a tall dandy in an indigo suit, with a jacket as long as a frock coat; he is played by Damon Wayans, who nails his character two inches short of caricature. He gives him the crisp, lofty accent of a college lecturer from fifty—even a hundred—years ago, and adjusts his spectacles in a manner befitting a Harvard graduate. In fact, Pierre has all the properties of the certified intellectual. There is only one problem. He writes for TV.

"Bamboozled" is a satire. We know this because Spike Lee, never a man to let an idea sit quietly on the page when it can be underlined, italicized, and filled out in red, has Pierre intone the dictionary definition of the word "satire" at the start. What, exactly, is being satirized is less clear; in the first third of the picture, it is television itself—big surprise—that takes it on the nose. There are plenty of strong, pushy scenes as Pierre and his fellow-creators are whipped and hounded by Dunwitty (Michael Rapaport), a senior vice-president of the network. Rapaport is the funniest thing in the film: a Visigoth with a leading chin and a dirty mouth, trampling on other people's sensibilities as if they were daisies. Ratings are on the slide, and Pierre is picked to jack them up; Dunwitty suggests a black show, and he gets it with a vengeance. Pierre comes back with the works: minstrels, chickens, watermelons, and white gloves. "A coon show," he says. And he wants it in blackface.

The two unfortunates hired to front "Mantan: The New Millennium Minstrel Show," as it's called, are a couple of street entertainers, Manray (Savion Glover) and Womack (Tommy Davidson). Any scruple they may have about the peculiar nature of their clowning duties is offset by the need, as Womack puts it, "to get some income coming in." Manray, a dancer, wants new tap shoes; Womack wants a full outfit of what he calls "Timmi Hillnigger"—the opening sally in Lee's campaign to catch hold of political correctness, rough it up, and send it back the way it came. This is smart and stirring in the buildup, as Pierre booby-traps a smooth white media consultant ("O great niggerologist," he calls her), and as he and Dunwitty outbrazen each other in the slapping down of taboos: "I'm blacker than you," Dunwitty declares, adding, "I don't give a damn what that prick Spike Lee says." Maybe, but I mind how he says it, and I'm not sure that the hasty, granulated look of "Bamboozled," with the camera scampering along behind the characters, was the way to go; I know that Lee is on urgent, unstable ground here, but the slackness of the movie does begin to feel ominous. When the lights come up on the pilot of "Mantan," we suddenly realize that, as an idea, it was loaded with all the outrage you could hope for. As a show, it sucks.



Savion Glover as a tap-dancing minstrel in "Bamboozled."

EDEL RODRIGUEZ

By now, however, Lee is in too deep. The plot demands that "Mantan" be a hit; audiences start turning up in blackface, shaking their gloves, Jolson style, at the camera. Dunwitty loves all this, because the ratings are halfway to the moon; Pierre loves it, because it proves that, in a racist society, the way to destroy stereotypes is not to skirt them but to pump them up till they burst. I don't buy it. Even if "Mantan" made you laugh, which it inescapably doesn't, I don't believe that people would line up to share the joke. Lee may genuinely think that nothing has changed since the days of Hattie McDaniel, or even of Jolson himself, but enough has changed for audiences to know that blackface is ugly and unfunny; the best sequence in "Bamboozled" comes toward the end, when we are simply presented with a montage of black images, from D. W. Griffith to Mickey Rooney and Judy Garland blacked up for "Babes in Arms." It's an awful legacy, entirely stripped of comedy, and I found myself wishing that Lee had harnessed his furies into a documentary on the history of blackface; it would have sent us home cowering, and he could have prefaced it with the great scene in the dressing room, when Manray and Womack burn a dish of corks, mash the remains with a spoon, and start to smear.

As it is, we will have to make do with "Bamboozled," which crumples to a close. The various contributors to "Mantan," including Pierre's colleague Sloan (Jada Pinkett-Smith), come to feel used and shamed by their success. The movie descends into a blitz of recriminations, complete with the guerrilla tactics of Sloan's revolutionary brother Big Black Africa (Mos Def). Lee throws in a handful of late additions to the plot, including a kidnapping, a murder or two, and a halfhearted interest in his characters' sex lives. He's like a man tipping more and more pepper and Tabasco into his Bloody Mary, desperate to get the balance right even though the result is undrinkable—all bite and no flavor. "What are you revolting against?" Sloan asks her brother, and the question reverberates through the film. Television may be an "idiot box," as Pierre tags it, but we knew that already; white-liberal guilt may be a sorry sight, but who ever said it was pretty?

As for the hero, his cultural predicament, caught between sabotage and collaboration, could have stretched toward the tragic, but Lee pulls too hard, and it snaps. Take the "jolly-nigger bank," a turn-of-the-century toy that Pierre keeps on his desk as the talisman of a vicious age; when you press a button on the back, it flips a coin into its smiling mouth. One day, to Pierre's horror, it flips all by itself. If this had happened just once, out of the corner of the camera's eye, it would have been devastating—a knifelike hint that someone nearby was taking a white fee in a bad cause. But then it flips again, and again, and Pierre starts discussing it in voice-over ("I was getting paranoid. Was I hallucinating?"), and the moment is botched and lost. It seems typical of the whole enterprise; Lee is not merely overplaying his hand but laying into conditions that he himself has summoned up. Not long ago, Spike Lee pictures had to be seen, and to be believed. These days, they are no less driven, but they feel oddly inessential; it is possible both to be awed by the stamina of his indignation and to wonder grimly what direction it will take next. There is no end to prejudice, but a satire on a fantasy—which is what "Bamboozled," for all its seethings of sorrow, boils down to—is not going to change, or even edify, the world.

Whether you go and see "Requiem for a Dream" depends on two things: first, on whether you admire the dramatic art of Ellen Burstyn, which I do, and, second, whether you like paying eight dollars to see a needle being plunged into a weeping wound the color of eggplant, which on the whole I don't. Darren Aronofsky's movie—his second after the clever, if insoluble, "π"—is an unblinking study of addiction. Burstyn plays Sara Goldfarb, a widow who lives quietly with her pet television in Brighton Beach. Offered a chance to be *on* TV but unable to squeeze into her favorite dress, she embarks on a dieting spree, gorging on a stash of lurid pills. Her son Harry (Jared Leto), by contrast, is more of a heroin man; he and his girlfriend, Marion (Jennifer Connelly), start the movie flying paper airplanes and dwindle into black-eyed ghosts.

The cost of drug-taking is in plain view here; nobody dies, but there is loss of limb, liberty, sanity, and honor. On the other hand, the look of drug-taking has never been served up with such panache; Aronofsky and his editor, Jay Rabinowitz, slice and shred the images of a rush—hubble, bubble, and the swift, moonlike dilation of a pupil—so acutely, and so repeatedly, that they wind up seeming every bit as fixated as their characters. The technical intelligence of the picture, layered by the thrum and tick of the soundtrack, is never in doubt, but it hardly gives Burstyn the space to breathe; it crowds and congests her, forcing her to freak out not just in closeup but within the bulging, insolent purview of a fish-eye lens. As if the poor dear weren't suffering enough. "Requiem for a Dream" is adapted from the book by Hubert Selby, Jr., the author of "Last Exit to Brooklyn," and, like that notorious work, it cannot quite conceal a strain of pulp sentimentality, curiously reminiscent of Arthur Miller, beneath a suppurating skin; when Sara, Harry, and Marion aren't shooting up or wizening into human scarecrows, they spend their time musing weakly on a happiness they could, or should, have had. In Sara's case, all she needs is food, and if Aronofsky's ruinous, relentless movie has a lesson to offer us, it is this: Chocolate—Just Say Yes. ♦

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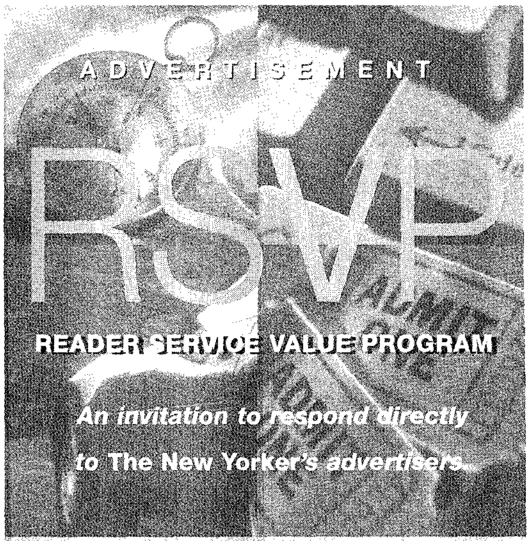
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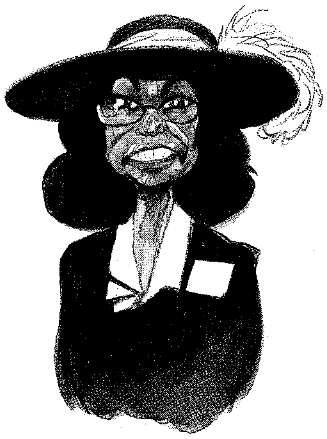
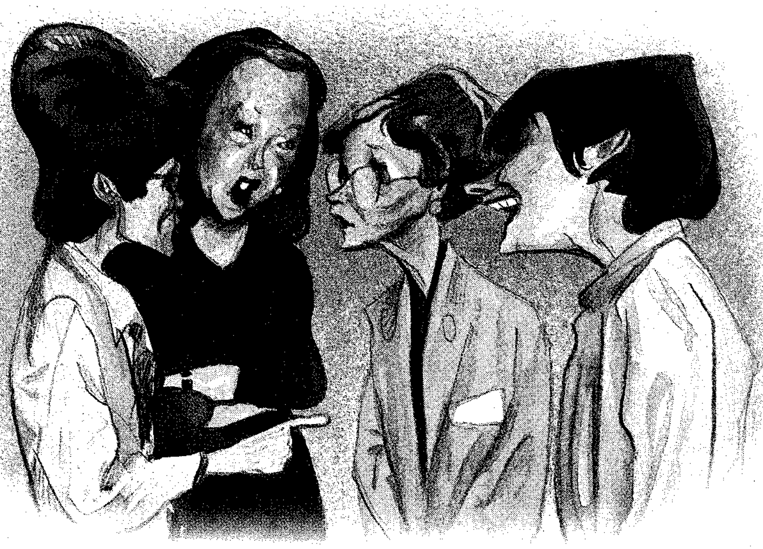
THE BACK PAGE BY STEVE BRODNER

WESTCHESTER WOMEN'S BREAKFAST

Westchester Women for Hillary hold a breakfast at the Rye Town Hilton, September 22, 2000.

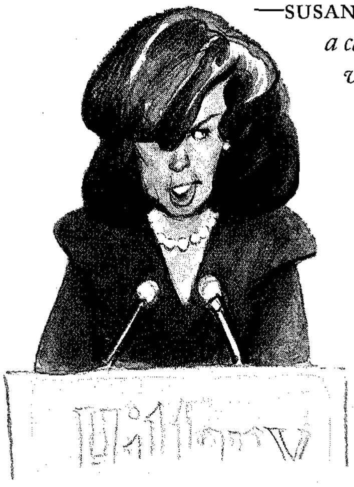


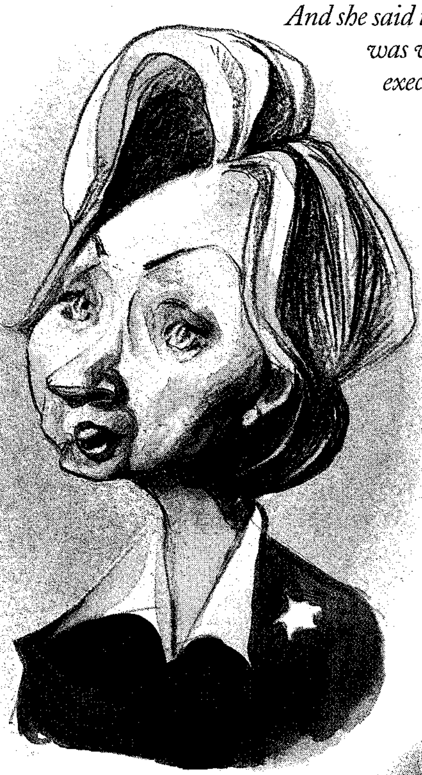
"She's in a man's world. When you get out there, you click your heels, you put up your chin, and you go for it." —ROSEMARY J. UZZO, *a volunteer coördinator for Westchester.*

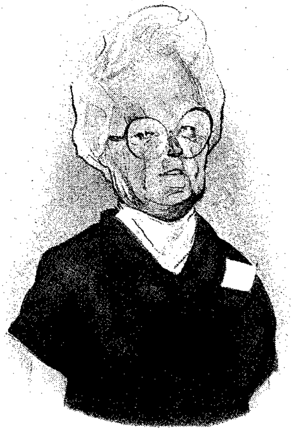


INKY WEISS *(second from right): "I said to her, 'I was at the White House. You won't remember me, but I'm David Saperstein's mother-in-law.' And she said to me, 'Oh, I love Ellen!' To a mommy, that was very impressive!" (Weiss's daughter Ellen is executive producer of "All Things Considered.")*

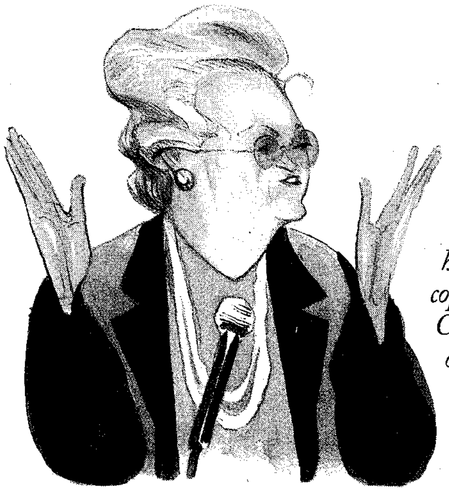
"We have close to a thousand women and a few very brave men." —SUSAN STERN, *a campaign volunteer.*



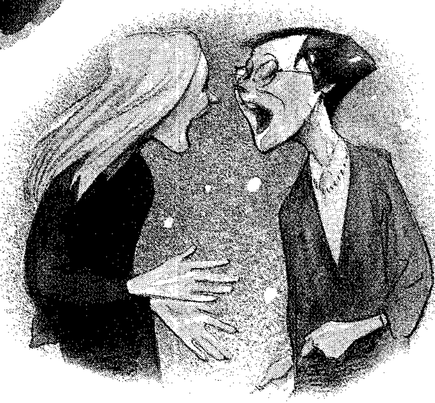




"People are looking at silly things, like she's a carpetbagger. But isn't our new cardinal a carpetbagger, too?" —CAROL CRAFT, *Yonkers.*



"I've got Rick Lazio over here. He's a Newt Gingrich copycat. I've got Hillary Rodham Clinton. Eleanor Roosevelt and other women are her leaders." —SARAH WEDDINGTON, *an attorney and politician in Austin, Texas.*



OVERHEARD: *"So what do you think?" "I've got the shivers, I'm so inspired."*

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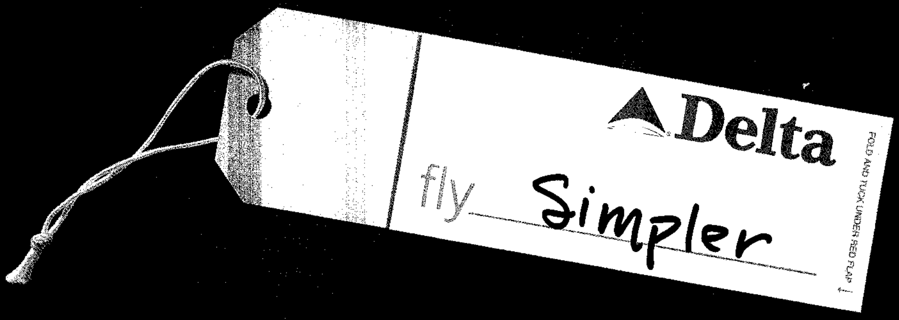
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